



ZAPATISTAS

The Chiapas Revolt and What It
Means for Radical Politics

Mihalis Mentinis

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*For the Zapatistas
and for Dimitris and Evanthia*

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Abbreviations

ACM: anti-capitalist movement.

ALCA: Area de Libre Comercio de las Américas (Free Trade Area of the Americas).

ANCIEZ: Alianza Nacional Campesina Independiente Emiliano Zapata (Independent Campesino National Alliance Emiliano Zapata).

ARIC: Asociación Rural de Interés Colectivo (Rural Association of Collective Interest).

CCRI-CG: Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena-Comandancia General (Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee-General Command).

CND: Convención Nacional Democrática (National Democratic Convention).

CNI: Congreso Nacional Indígena (National Indigenous Congress).

COCOPA: Comisión por la Concordia y Pacificación (Committee for the Concordance and Pacification).

CONAI: Comisión Nacional de Intermediación (National Committee of Intermediation).

DF: Distrito Federal (Federal District).

EPR: Ejército Popular Revolucionario (Revolutionary Popular Army).

ESRAZ: Escuela Secundaria Rebelde Autónoma Zapatista (Zapatista Autonomous Rebel Secondary School).

EZLN: Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army for National Liberation).

FLN: Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Forces).

FZLN: Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Front for National Liberation).

IMF: International Monetary Fund.

MST: Movimiento sin Tierra (The Landless Movement).

x Zapatistas

NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement.

NGO: non-governmental organisation.

PAN: Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party).

PPF: Policia Federal Preventiva (Federal Preventive Police).

PPP: Plan Puebla-Panama.

PRD: Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (Party of the Democratic Revolution).

PRI: Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party).

PRONASOL: Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (National Solidarity Programme).

UNAM: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico (National Autonomous University of Mexico).

Preface

The story is now well known: at the dawn of 1 January 1994, implementation day of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Canada, the United States and Mexico, a group of about 3,000 Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Tojolabal, Zoque, Chol and Ma'am indigenous guerrillas, lightly armed and masked with black ski-masks or red scarves, attacked and occupied several municipalities and townships in the south-eastern Mexican state of Chiapas. The rebels called themselves the 'Zapatista Army for National Liberation' (hereafter: EZLN and/or Zapatistas) and talked about the hundreds of years of oppression and exploitation of the indigenous populations, the crime of global neo-liberal reality, and the struggle for land, justice, freedom and democracy for all. The news could not have been more devastating for the Mexican president, Carlos Salinas, who, surrounded by his officials, was celebrating both New Year's Eve and Mexico's entry into the 'First World', and the Mexican and international economic lobbies: 'the Zapatistas had declared war on the Mexican government'.

The appearance of the EZLN baffled the believers in the end of the revolutionary era; the global context seemed less than favourable for a return to armed struggle. The Soviet bloc and 'really existing socialism' were things of the past, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua had suffered an electoral defeat (in February 1990), a peace agreement had been signed in Salvador (in 1992) and another was imminent in Guatemala, the leaders of other Latin American guerrilla groups had been hunted down, and Cuba had long since shown its alliance with President Salinas and the 'Institutional Revolutionary Party' (hereafter: PRI). Furthermore, and most importantly, Marxism as a theory of revolutionary praxis seemed to have been in a long period of crisis and transformation and appeared to have a rather uncertain future. Who then were those indigenous rebels who had come out of the jungle despite the unfavourable conditions, and adducing the necessity of a quixotic madness in the struggle to change the world without taking power?

More than a decade has passed since New Year's Day 1994 when Subcomandante Marcos, the Zapatista spokesperson and commander of the EZLN, announced a revolution in the streets of San Cristóbal

and declared war on the Mexican government and global capitalism; twelve years of war with the Mexican government, of massacres and terrorism committed by paramilitary groups, of the destruction of indigenous communities by the federal army; but also twelve years of resistance, direct democracy, autonomous education, intercontinental meetings for humanity and against neo-liberalism. Over all these years a large amount of academic and non-academic work has been done on the Chiapas revolt from a variety of perspectives, and with a number of focuses. Political theorists and analysts have been asking whether the Zapatistas are a continuation of the Latin American National Liberation armies, or whether they are ushering in a new type of politics; whether they are the product of structural inequality and extreme poverty, or an expression of identity politics; whether they are revolutionaries or reformists, postmodern guerrillas or armed social democrats, and so on.

Yet despite the attention the Zapatistas have attracted, there is little consensus about the nature, strategies and efficacy of the movement. On the one hand, the movement seems to have challenged the so-called 'end of history', and has managed to reignite once again radical politics, inspiring a series of anti-capitalist struggles across the globe. On the other hand, the Zapatistas have failed to bring about radical change, and have made little progress on their broader political agenda. With the experience of all these years of Zapatista activity and theoretical work on them, it is now time to move on in our understanding of the movement, to undertake a critical examination of certain aspects of the rebellion and explore new dimensions of the Chiapas revolt, so expanding its potentiality and implications for the future.

This book aims to contribute precisely to this, to a new approach to, and understanding, of the Zapatista insurrection. My main objective has been to move towards a new theorisation of the Zapatista rebellion in terms of the importance of the 1994 events for radical politics and radical subjectivities. Furthermore, I aim to contribute to a critical examination of certain aspects of the Zapatista movement within the contemporary political order. I have made use of material and literature in English and Spanish, as well as fieldnotes that I took during my nine months' visit to the Zapatista autonomous zone in 2001. However, I have to state right from the start that this book is not a straightforward, empirical account of the Zapatistas. My presence in Chiapas has been very important in terms of acquainting myself with Spanish-language literature and

ongoing discussions on the movement and, most importantly, for obtaining first-hand information concerning a number of aspects about the organisation, its internal workings and cultural elements of the autonomous Zapatista communities. The data collected, however, have been employed as supportive material for a broader theoretical discussion of the Zapatistas and, therefore, the book should not be read as fieldwork, ethnography or anything of the sort.

Given the fact that what initially attracted my attention to and sympathy for the Zapatistas was what the rebels proclaimed and what I perceived as its radical political agenda, and since what motivated me to write a book on this topic was my interest in revolutionary politics, I have, consequently, approached the events in Chiapas from the perspective of the revolutionary project of a radical transformation of the political and social terrain. In other words, it is revolutionary practice and theory that guide my reading, analysis, discussion and theorisation of the Zapatistas, and define, at the same time, my ethical stance on the movement. There are, thus, two indissolubly connected constitutive axes, endemic in radical theory and practice, alongside which this book unfolds – a theoretical constructive one, and a critical deconstructive one. On the one hand, I have engaged in a theoretical exploration of the uniqueness of the 1994 rebellion and the distinctive character of the Zapatista rebellion as an ‘evental situation’. My aim has been to elucidate those elements of the rebellion that present us with an historical event of great significance in terms of its implications for radical politics and radical subjectivities. On the other hand, I have adopted a critical approach towards the Zapatistas as a movement, as a collective subject, emerging after 1994. My emphasis has been on certain aspects of the discourse and praxis of the movement that have been largely overlooked or inadequately discussed in the pro-Zapatista literature, especially academic literature.

OVERVIEW

The brief history of the Zapatistas I present in Chapter 1 attests to the fact that, at least at its inception and in its early years, the movement operated within a revolutionary imaginary which aimed, by means of armed struggle, at the revolutionary transformation of the established order in Mexico. Drawing on sources that include historical documents and journalistic accounts, I have followed the movement starting from political upheaval in Mexico in the late

1960s and the first *focos de guerrilla* which were installed in Chiapas, to the 1994 occupation of a number of municipalities in Chiapas by the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) and Subcomandante Marcos' 'this is a revolution', to the address of the Mexican Congress of the Union by the Zapatista *comandancia* in 2001. This historical account sets the context within which the Zapatistas have emerged and operate, and enables the reader to grasp the political course of the movement from its initial emphasis on socialism to its recent demands for constitutional reforms. The information and analysis provided in this chapter are essential in order to situate the Zapatistas in time and space and understand the positions, arguments and points made throughout the book. Beyond this obvious supportive role in the unfolding of the book, however, Chapter 1 aims to move beyond the two dominant tendencies of uncritical jubilant historical accounts on the one hand, and, hostile accounts constructed to pathologise the EZLN and undermine the importance of the movement, on the other, towards a radical critical-supportive chronology of the events in Chiapas.

Searching the pro-Zapatista literature I realised that the rebellion itself, as much as the Zapatistas as a movement emerging after 1994, are subsumed to pre-constituted theories that fail to grasp the novelty and uniqueness of the events. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, where I review various readings of the Zapatistas, despite the fact that all the readings reviewed elucidate important aspects of the movement, there is something in the rebellion that escapes their theoretical frameworks. This fact, often accompanied by an emphasis on structural explanations of the rebellion or issues of identity, with a parallel disregard of the subjectivities involved, reduces the Zapatistas to a case study for the confirmation of theories, and trivialises their importance for radical politics. It is only in the autonomist Marxist camp that we can detect some attempt to grasp and theorise what is novel in the Zapatistas, and account for the subjectivities involved in their struggle, although these attempts are somewhat limited in their scope. Furthermore, Chapter 2 presents us with another problem of the existing literature, namely the totally uncritical approach to the movement by the academic perspective; an uncritical approach that often results in crude idealisations. When critique does become the focus of discussion, in perspectives outside the academy, this often takes a hostile form and gives the impression that nothing in the Zapatistas merits attention. The few attempts to balance critique with an understanding of the broader political significance of the

movement, although accurate in their analysis and conclusions, are often poorly theorised. Thus, given these limitations of the existing readings, we have to move beyond their focus and construct a theoretical framework that will allow us to (a) grasp what is novel in the Chiapas revolt and what it means for radical politics (Chapter 4); (b) to discuss the production of radical subjectivities in Chiapas and outside Mexico as a result of the Zapatista revolt (Chapter 4); (c) to critically evaluate aspects of the movement's discourse and praxis (Chapter 5); and (d) to explore the local production of radical subjectivities, their intersection with the indigenous social imaginary, and their importance for conditioning the rebellion (Chapter 6).

With these directions for analysis in mind, I proceed to Chapter 3, where I discuss Cornelius Castoriadis' (1988a, 1988b, 1991) notion of the 'project of autonomy', linking it to the notion of 'constituent power' as discussed in the work of Antonio Negri (1999). By doing this I intend to develop a theoretical framework for situating radical political processes and understanding the revolutionary project as the unfolding of the project of autonomy expressed as constituent power. The project of autonomy is the emergence of a social imaginary signification that implies the continuous questioning of the whole edifice of society in an unending process towards the autonomous constitution of life and human liberation. When the deployment of the project of autonomy becomes constituent power (and it can be fully expressed only in so far as it becomes constituent power) it becomes a revolutionary project. It is in fact the historical unfolding of the project of autonomy throughout European modernity that explains the emergence of the great revolutions, from the English to the Russian, and constitutes, at the same time, the unfolding of an historical line within which the Zapatistas' political activity can be situated. The present world order within which the movement has emerged and operates, and within which the project of autonomy has to be materialised, I describe, following Hardt and Negri (2000), as the concept of 'Empire'. This is a theoretical framework that I refer to in all the subsequent chapters, and enables me to discuss the Zapatista rebellion in relation to Alain Badiou's (2002) concept of the 'event', and the production of radical subjectivities (Chapter 4), to carry out a critical analysis of the Zapatistas within Empire (Chapter 5), and explore the radical changes in the indigenous social imaginary, as well as the accompanying construction of a collective radical subjectivity (Chapter 6).

The theoretical constructive direction of this book, concerning the unique character of the rebellion, as well as its importance for revolutionary subjectivities, is developed in Chapter 4. Drawing mainly on Alain Badiou's (2002) theory, and more specifically on his idea of the 'event' and 'fidelity' to the event, as well as on 'Situationist' theory and the autonomist Marxist concept of 'self-valorisation', I construct a theoretical framework that aims at two mutually interconnected directions: first, to apply the theories and concepts mentioned in order to understand certain aspects of the Zapatistas; and second, to discuss revolutionary subjectivities. In relation to the first what I aim at is a new understanding of the rebellion, of its specificity, its importance for world politics and the socio-historical task it invites us to participate in. Combining Badiou's notion of the 'event' and the Situationist concept of 'constructed situations' a new category emerges, that of the 'evental situation', which best describes the Zapatista insurrection. In relation to the second, I expand Badiou's theory with reference to the events in Chiapas, and discuss the construction of revolutionary subjectivity in terms of one's degrees and types of involvement with the Zapatista insurrection, and distinguish among three 'subjects of fidelity' to the Zapatista evental situation. I then explore limitations in Badiou's theory, and suggest a way round them with reference to the theoretical framework constructed. This is a step that will bring us closer to the conclusions of this book.

I proceed to a critical reading of the Zapatistas in Chapter 5, with the aim of identifying those aspects of the movement that appear to be at odds with the revolutionary project, limiting or blocking its expansion. I have been interested mainly in issues that have been overlooked for the most part, or not adequately addressed by the perspectives discussed in Chapter 2, such as the EZLN's position vis-à-vis other Mexican rebel groups, especially the Revolutionary Popular Army (EPR), the emphasis the Zapatistas put on the Mexican nation and their defence of it, as well as the contradictions and discrepancies between the egalitarian public discourse of the Zapatistas and the oppressive practices within the indigenous communities. This latter area of critique is based on observations I made in the indigenous communities during my stay in Chiapas and it is something I have had to be careful with. More specifically, I have tried to produce a critique of issues I believe are in diametrical opposition to the project of human liberation, without, as Debord (1998) has argued, 'giving too much information to just anybody'. At the same time,

avoiding engaging in a critique that would serve the enemy rather than the revolutionary project, I have tried to show how the Zapatista public discourse feeds back into the communities, producing sites of resistance and possibilities for change. Furthermore, in the same chapter, I have focused on the broader significance of the Zapatista movement for world radical politics and the international struggle. This is an aspect I touched upon in the previous chapter and I further elaborate here

In Chapter 6, I move into the indigenous world and explore an aspect of the Zapatistas that so far has received very little attention in the literature. This is the dominant presence of the indigenous element in the movement and its consequent indigenous character. I have done so by focusing on the 'indigenous social imaginary' in Chiapas and I have tried to show the threads that link the indigenous social imaginary and the Zapatista struggle, their mutual impregnation and interconnection. Within this framework, the Zapatista balaclavas are explained in terms of the indigenous Zapatista imaginary and the socio-political transformative processes that are taking place in the area. This chapter has a double purpose: first, to shed light on the local aspects of the rebellion which have previously been ignored; and second, and most importantly, to elucidate the local basis of the Zapatista revolutionary subjectivities. The revolutionary subjectivities that have emerged in Chiapas, despite the fact that they are immersed in western theoretical discussions, are rooted in the indigenous social imaginary and in hundreds of years of belief in the transformative power of *naguals* (animal co-essences).

In the concluding chapter, I bring everything together in a discussion of where all this leads us. I will pose the question of what this tells us and where it leaves us in terms of the future; what are the limitations, and what are the direction in which the subjects of fidelity (identified in Chapter 5) are required to move within Empire. I conclude by discussing Marcos' personal trajectory and prefiguring a radical theory of militancy based on the personal decision to commit oneself to a common cause, a decision that eventually brings a rupture in one's life. This is, I will argue, a personal will to metamorphosis that can only be expressed and realised through militant participation in a radical collective project.

1

Zapatista Chronicle

The problem with globalisation in neo-liberalism is that the globes burst.

Subcomandante Marcos, 1996, Don Durito de la Lacandona

It is essential to the purpose of this book, and perhaps to any attempt to understand the Chiapas revolt, that Zapatista political activity and the Zapatista project are presented and analysed in their chronological unfolding through the years of struggle and resistance since the first appearance of the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) in 1994. We need, in other words, an historical account of the deployment of the Zapatista 'war against oblivion' that will not merely descriptively plod through the events but, on the contrary, will bring the movement to life for the reader, grasping and opening up to discussion the most important aspects and processes of its trajectory so far. Drawing on a variety of sources, ranging from journalistic accounts to anecdotes, I will first present a short account of what can be called the Zapatista pre-history, in order to shed light on decades of political processes and activity that preceded Marcos' declaration 'this is a revolution', and the Zapatistas' *ya basta* ('enough is enough'). Then, in the main body of this chronicle, I will follow the movement from the EZLN's taking of San Cristóbal in 1994 to the 'taking' of Mexico City by the Zapatista caravan in 2001, and the failure of the Zapatista commanders to persuade the Mexican Senate to vote in favour of the 'Indigenous Law'.

This historical account has two interrelated aims. The first is to contribute to a history of the Zapatista revolt from the point of view of the revolutionary project. Capital writes its own history; we write our own. The second aim, related to the unfolding of this thesis, is to situate in space and time the various political readings, critical analysis and discussion of the movement that follow in the subsequent chapters. It should be made clear that this is not intended to be an historical account encompassing the entirety of the movement's activity with a detailed analysis of both the national and international context within which it emerged, operated and still operates. As I have already mentioned, my aim is to bring the

movement to life by stressing nodal points in its trajectory, and always in relation to the main focuses of this book.

THE EARLY YEARS: THE PRE-HISTORY OF THE EZLN

One thing is certain, and most analysts (e.g. De La Grange and Rico, 1997) seem to agree with this, the birth of the main Mexican revolutionary groups of the last 40 years is to be found sometime in the late 1960s and more specifically on 2 October 1968, the date of the Tlatelolco massacre. Ignoring the authorities' ban, the students had decided to gather that day in Tlatelolco, in the heart of Mexico City, in order to protest against the repression, the government's reaction to the growing protest and widespread questioning of its legitimacy among several sectors of Mexican society (Montemayor, 1997). The first volley of bullets, coming from buildings where several government snipers had been positioned, were aimed at the military forces surrounding the square of Las Tres Culturas, where the demonstrators had gathered. The provocation ended in a slaughter. The authorities acknowledged 27 deaths. The unofficial numbers did not fall below 300. The Mexican government decided to block any investigation and declared the documents concerning the massacre 'classified'. Ten days later, the Olympic Games opened in Mexico.

The Tlatelolco massacre consolidated the formation of revolutionary groups, which, inspired by the Cuban revolution, aimed at overthrowing the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (hereafter: PRI); In 1969, a year after the killings in Tlatelolco, a group of university students founded a revolutionary group: Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional (hereafter: FLN), a group whose aim was to establish in Mexico of a people's republic with a socialist system. The principal leader of the FLN was Cesar German Yanez. His brother Fernando Yanez, also a member of the FLN, would later be the main founder of the EZLN, and he is today the intermediary between the Zapatistas and the government, identified by the latter as Comandante German, and known among the Zapatistas as 'El arquitecto'. The FLN decided to introduce its first *focos de guerrilla* in the jungle of Chiapas, an area it was believed had an enormous revolutionary potential due to the presence there of all the preconditions for the spread of revolutionary ideas, as well as to its geographical position and topography which favoured guerrilla tactics. After organising the necessary infrastructure in Mexico City and other cities of the

north, the FLN set up its first guerrilla camp in the Lacandona jungle in 1972 (De La Grange and Rico, 1997).

In 1970, Luis Echeverría became President of Mexico. He had been Minister of the Interior at the time of the Tlatelolco massacre and was accused of direct complicity in the massacre and other atrocities. After a second massacre of students occurred during Echeverría's administration in 1971, the resulting outrage forced him to try to clean up his image. The federal government policies in the 1970s aimed to pacify the discontent of workers, farmers and students, and in the countryside attention was given to promoting *campesino* organisations, rural development programmes, and encouraging the creation of new *ejido* associations (land collectively owned, which can be inherited but not sold). The government's policies, however, did not bring about any intrinsic change since they left intact the economic and political interests of the powerful rural elite. As a result of the inadequacy of these policies to improve the life conditions of people in the countryside, but also due to the populist policies of Echeverría, activism and new *campesino* movements flourished throughout that decade (Ortiz, 2001).

In Chiapas, the 1970s and 1980s were characterised by the emergence of a number of *campesino* organisations as well as minor armed groups, and the intense political activity in the area started crystallising by the late 1980s in the formation of the Zapatistas. One of the biggest organisations formed in the Lacandona jungle was the K'ip Tic Talekumtasel (Quiptic) (Tzeltal for 'We unite our forces to progress') in 1975. Quiptic, a fusion of cultural, economic, social and religious components which gave the organisation, according to Marcos, a fundamentalist character (Le Bot, 1997), emerged from a nation-wide meeting of the Indigenous Congress organised by the Bishop of San Cristóbal, and enthusiast of 'Liberation Theology', Samuel Ruiz in 1974. Other organisations that emerged in that period were the Union de Ejidos Tierra y Libertad and the Brigada Revolucionaria Emiliano Zapata. In fact, a number of organisations of various political affiliations from the broader left (Maoists, Trotskyists, Guevarists, Leninists, etc.) installed themselves in that period in Chiapas in an attempt to organise the local population. The basic demands of all these groups were 'land and freedom'. The role of the Catholic Church was catalytic for the political organisation of the *campesinos* given the strong position the Church enjoyed within the indigenous communities. Since the early 1970s, Legorreta (1996, cited in De La Grange and Rico, 1997) argues, the Church

was producing the ideological conditions for bringing people to struggle, but it was not giving them the means to do so. Indeed, the indigenous catechists trained by the dioceses to spread Liberation Theology in the communities lacked both the experience and political background for carrying out such a task. Maoist advisers invited by the dioceses undertook to carry out the task, and soon started organising the population according to the tactics of the Guerra Popular Prolongada.

Protests from workers and indigenous *campesinos* in Chiapas during the 1970s were subjected to violent military repression, and the local powerful landowners, with the support of the government, formed paramilitary groups to control indigenous resistance by violence. Assassinations and disappearances of indigenous campesinos became routine. At the beginning of the 1980s there was nothing to suggest that the situation would improve. In July 1980 the army attacked the township of Wololchan and killed twelve farmers. New peasant movements emerged throughout the state (Bajo Palabra, 2001). The most influential of those was the Union de Uniones, which in 1988 would transform itself into the 'Rural Association of Collective Interest' (hereafter: ARIC). By 1982 the militants of the FLN and allied organisations had already come into contact with people from organisations and communities outside the jungle in the mountains of Chiapas, co-operating with a newly created Catholic organisation named Slop (Tzeltal for 'root'), whose primary aim was the organisation of indigenous resistance. In 1983, in a climate of repression and terror carried out by the police, federal army and paramilitary groups (e.g. Las guardias blancas), which aimed to maintain the interests of the *finqueros* (large landowners), and after another group of militants had arrived from the city to join the guerrilla group, the FLN, following a period of internal changes, and now including a number of recruited indigenous *guerrilleros*, was renamed Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN).

The years to come were preparation for the new organisation, which, having a defensive doctrine, preferred not to take direct action and continued with the internal organisation of its military and civil bases in the indigenous communities. Within a few years the EZLN, from being a small guerrilla group, had been transformed into an indigenous army of some thousands of men and women, and supported by a growing number of communities in the jungle and mountains of Chiapas. Meanwhile a crisis had arisen in Quiptic when some of the Maoists organisers tried to take control of the group and were accused of being government agents (some of these same

Maoists worked openly for the government in later administrations) (Montemayor, 1998). Eventually, in 1988, after the Maoist advisers had left Chiapas, Quiptic merged with ARIC, and could now count on the support of 6,000 families. The Zapatistas managed to infiltrate the organisation and eventually took control of it, sparking the development of two tendencies within the group, a reformist one and a revolutionary one. Some years later, following the suppression of the revolutionary fraction from the leadership of the group, which was developing in favour of 'legalist' policies, the Zapatistas formed a rival organisation, the Alianza Nacional Campesina Independiente Emiliano Zapata (ANCIEZ), which would soon come to be the political front of the EZLN (De La Grange and Rico, 1997; Ortiz, 2001).

In the summer of 1988 Mexico was in a state of political volatility. Carlos Salinas had been elected president of the republic, but his election had been denounced as a fraud by the left and right opposition, which organised massive demonstrations across the country demanding a recount of the votes. The new president, however, had already been recognised by the United States, many European countries and Cuba. Salinas promised economic stability, a welfare state and democratisation. The National Solidarity Programme (PRONASOL), created in 1992, was one of Salinas's welfare policies, with funds from the World Bank, aiming to create an infrastructure and modernise Mexico's poor areas, including Chiapas. The money, however, was controlled by the PRI and was used as a source of funds for party bosses to purchase loyalty, as well as modernising projects such as building new jails. The same year the PRI government amended the constitution to eliminate communally owned land, the *ejidos*, which formed the basis for subsistence for many indigenous communities (Neill et al., n.d., late 1990s).

Despite the fact that the Guatemalan intelligence agencies had long since informed their Mexican counterparts about the existence of a guerrilla group in the Lacandona jungle, the group was believed to be small, consisting of lightly armed peasants, and therefore was assumed not to pose any serious threat. But the discovery in May 1993 of a guerrilla camp in the middle of the jungle made it clear that the group was better organised and equipped than previously thought (De La Grange and Rico, 1997). The political situation at that time, however, did not call for action to be taken against the guerrillas. Mexico was preparing to join NAFTA and, at the same time, the 'First World', which Salinas had prompted as the solution to the country's economic problems. Furthermore, during his election campaign

Salinas had promised a better relationship with Mexico's indigenous populations. A military operation in the Lacandona jungle, in an area inhabited almost exclusively by indigenous people, as well as the mere admission of the existence of a guerrilla organisation in Chiapas could complicate negotiations with the United States and have disastrous economic consequences for the government. Thus, some months after the incident in the jungle, Salinas reassured his readers in an interview that 'there is a stable social climate across the country' (quoted in Montemayor, 1997, p. 50; my translation). Even at this stage nobody could imagine the size of the guerrilla organisation and what was to follow. On 1 August 1993 the Minister of Interior, and former governor of Chiapas, Patrocinio González, gave public reassurances that there were no guerrillas in Chiapas and that rumours were putting in risk the economic development of the area by deterring foreign and national investment (De La Grange and Rico, 1997; Levario Turcott, 1999).

A year before the discovery of the guerrilla camp in the jungle, the indigenous communities were engaged in a process of meetings and discussions to decide the future of their organisation. The discussions concluded with a collective decision whereby the majority voted in favour of declaring war on the Mexican state and authorised Subcomandante Marcos, the *mestizo* leader of the EZLN and after 1994 spokesperson of the Zapatistas, to make all the necessary preparations for war. Later that year, on 12 October, the country was celebrating the 500th anniversary of 'the meeting of two worlds', the government's eloquent formulation of the Spanish *conquista*. The same day some 10,000 indigenous (half of whom were members of ANCIEZ) demonstrated in San Cristóbal commemorating in their own way what they called 'the cultural lie of the meeting of two worlds'. After knocking down the statue of the Spanish *conquistador* and founder of the city, Diego de Mazariegos, which stood in one of the city's squares, the crowd withdrew to the jungle and mountains of Chiapas. Without anybody realising it, the Zapatistas had made their first public appearance. Fifteen months after this simulation of war, the Tzotziles, Tzeltales, Choles, Tojolabales, Zoques and Ma'ames of Chiapas would reappear, this time masked and armed, in the streets of San Cristóbal to declare war on the Mexican government (Monsivais, 1999).

Although the above is a very condensed chronicle of the years preceding the Zapatista insurrection, we should see its construction as a site of political contestation. Authors from the centre and right

have normally constructed the Zapatista pre-history as a political means of neutralising and often blackening the movement's past and, consequently, its present, challenging the hypostasis of its discourse, and belittling its significance and democratic horizon. Some authors engage in a purely journalistic analysis and construction of Zapatista pre-history (e.g. De La Grange and Rico, 1997), while others offer more theoretically nuanced accounts, which are nothing more than a selective reproduction of the same anti-Zapatista journalistic accounts in the garb of theoretical analysis.

Discussing Zapatista pre-history, for instance, Guerrero-Chiprés (2004) constructs his version of the Zapatista origins within Laclau's (1990) framework of 'ignobility'. The author's argument, following Laclau, is that in the struggle to establish itself as the source of all good, any force that wants to achieve political hegemony must erase its 'ignoble' beginnings. Guerrero-Chiprés uses mainly anti-Zapatista sources, and selectively chooses those elements that fit his theoretical framework, and produce an image of the EZLN's past as being 'ignoble'. In his account, the social and political context is completely absent. The violence of the state, the atrocities committed by the paramilitary groups, the violent suppression of *campesino* protests and of their political demands, and the disappearances and murders of activists, are all omitted or treated as irrelevant. Eliminating the political and social context within which FLN and EZLN emerged presents the Zapatista origins as ignoble, for the Zapatista political activity that led to the insurrection of 1994 exists in a vacuum and appears irrational. Having constructed the movement's origins as 'ignoble', Guerrero-Chiprés makes another step, and pathologises the origins of the movement and, to a certain extent, the present movement, by attributing to the EZLN a 'military drive'.

It is true that Zapatista activity prior to 1994, and indeed after, impacted on the living conditions of the general population which, for those who opposed the Zapatista project and the armed struggle, had negative consequences since they had to leave their communities to flee the war. It is also true that the EZLN inherited and maintained a militaristic logic, at least until the early months of 1994. However, unlike conservative simplistic anti-Zapatista approaches that attempt to pathologise the EZLN's past, we need to see the conception and development of the EZLN in relation to the socio-political conditions existing in Chiapas and Mexico. In other words – and this is what I have tried to show in the chronicle sketched above – the emergence of the EZLN and its military logics do not constitute an 'ignoble'

origin, but the most effective means of resistance within a violent, repressive and militarised political context. However, and despite the fact that the oppressive conditions did condition the emergence of the EZLN, we should be careful not to reduce the emergence of the organisation to purely objective conditions. It is important to see the emergence and development of the EZLN in terms of the radical subjectivities of those who actively and militantly were involved in the preparation of the rebellion. This is something that I will discuss in more detail in subsequent chapters.

ZAPATISTA CHRONICLE, 1994–2001

‘This is a revolution’

The numerous tourists, journalists and local people in the colonial town of San Cristóbal could scarcely understand what was happening on 1 January 1994. In the main square of the town a masked man of white complexion, dressed in black and with a machine gun in his hand, stood out among the others. He was making declarations to the cameras and was communicating with other units through a radio. The people surrounding him heard his fellow rebels calling him ‘comandante’ or ‘subcomandante’. Later, it would be known that his name was ‘Subcomandante’ Marcos:

The crowd was looking at him with surprise and anxiety. ‘Are you going to let us go?’ a foreign visitor to the town asks. The tourists had been previously informed that they could return to their places on 2 January. ‘Why do you want to go?’ replied the man. ‘Enjoy the city.’ Some were asking, shouting, if they could go by car to Cancún. Everybody wanted to speak at the same time. A guide obviously annoyed raised his voice to say that he had to take some tourists to see the ruins of Palenque. Marcos lost his patience but not his sense of humour. ‘The road to Palenque is closed,’ he said. ‘We have taken Ocosingo. We apologise for any inconvenience but this is a revolution.’ (quoted in Tello Diaz, 1995, p. 16; my translation)

Today we say ‘ya basta’

The official announcements treated the rebellion with racist hostility, and the government called on the rebels to withdraw and return to legal means for solutions to their demands (Montemayor, 1997). The Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee – General Command of the EZLN (hereafter: CCRI-CG), however, had already

issued the *Primera Declaracion de la Selva Lacandona* ('First Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle'), titled: 'Today we say "*ya basta*"' ('enough is enough'), which justified the armed struggle as the only alternative available to the indigenous population of Chiapas, and called on the Mexican people to unite against seven decades of dictatorship of the PRI (EZLN, 1994a). This First Declaration, however, reflecting the various political affiliations and experiences of the movement's components, was somewhat authoritarian in its conclusions and maintained the style of the old Latin American revolutionary groups (Monsivais, 1998). At that time the Zapatistas seemed to see the armed struggle as the only effective way of opening a democratic space and challenging the hegemonic position of the PRI. The government responded with fury and battles started between the EZLN and the Mexican federal army. These lasted ten days and ended up with an indeterminate number of deaths, some 200 to 300, for the most part Zapatistas.

On 6 January, President Carlos Salinas gave his own version of the rebellion: 'some professional mercenaries and a group of foreigners, alien to the efforts of the Mexican society, struck a painful blow in a zone of Chiapas and the heart of all Mexicans' (quoted in Monsivais, 1999, p. 16; my translation). Racist commentators argued that the rebels could not have been indigenous because the indigenous were not capable of using technologically advanced arms, and one columnist stated that the indigenous were genetically incapable of rebellion. Sectors of Mexican society, however, had started showing sympathy for the Zapatistas. There were demonstrations and demands for peace all over the country. On 10 January Manuel Camacho, at that time Minister of Foreign Affairs, was appointed Commissioner for peace and Reconciliation in Chiapas and two days later the government, bowing to demands for peace and pressure for a political solution to the conflict (more than 100,000 people gathered in Mexico City protesting against the attempted annihilation of the rebels), announced a unilateral ceasefire to which the EZLN responded positively (Montemayor, 1997). The Zapatistas came into contact with various sectors of Mexican society, and through national and international media presented their own version of events. Represented by the media-genic Subcomandante Marcos, and with an apparent change in their discourse, which emphasised concepts like democracy, justice and humanity, and with an openness to dialogue with the government and 'civil society' policy, the Zapatistas, from being 'professional mercenaries' passed, for a large

part of the Mexican society, as 'social rebels'. And the anti-hierarchical structure of the movement, collective decision-making and an anti-militaristic political agenda made many commentators talk of the first postmodern guerrilla.

In the days following the ceasefire, the Zapatistas, after internal discussions, finally accepted the federal government's representative, Manuel Camacho, and proposed a four-point agenda of political, social and economic demands for the peace talks. The dialogue would take place in the cathedral of the city of San Cristóbal, and the intermediary would be the Bishop of San Cristóbal, Samuel Ruiz, who was acceptable to both parties. On 18 January, only three days before the start of the dialogues, following the government's offer of an amnesty to the rebels if they agreed to apologise, the EZLN issued one of its most eloquent communiqués: 'For what are they going to forgive us?' (Holloway and Pelaez, 1998). There, concisely but with a masterful completeness which touched many sectors of the Mexican society, the Zapatistas explained who they were, what they were fighting for and sketched out their enemy. The text included the following:

What are we supposed to ask pardon for? What are they going to pardon us for? For not dying of hunger? For not being silent in our misery? For not having accepted humbly the giant historical burden of contempt and neglect? For having risen up in arms when we found all the roads blocked? Who should ask for pardon and who should grant it? Those who, for years and years, sat at a laden table and ate their fill while death sat with us, death, so everyday, so ours that we stopped being afraid of it? Those who filled our pockets and souls with declarations and promises ... (quoted in Holloway and Pelaez, 1998, p. 7)

The enemy the Zapatistas portrayed in that communiqué was the Mexican elite represented by PRI. After the 1910–17 'Mexican revolution', Mexico had lived in relative political stability and, unlike other Latin American countries, had experienced no *coup d'état*. The PRI enjoyed almost 71 years of uninterrupted domination until 2000, with the ideology of the Mexican revolution functioning as the pillar of its hegemonic power. Guerrero-Chiprés (2004) describes this ideology as comprising at least three central elements: first, there was an assumption that no alternative to the PRI and its elite could exist; second, it comprised the belief that political violence had exhausted its foundational force during the Mexican revolution;

finally, it assumed that political violence could only be exercised by the government as representative of the nation. Within this framework, all other forces should be denounced as illegitimate and annihilated, as had happened many times in relation to the insurgencies of the 1960s and 1970s. These are precisely the three assumptions the Zapatistas challenged in their 'First Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle' in 1994, attempting to strip the PRI of its ideological bases and render open the political space. In Chapter 5 I will return to this, and will examine in more detail the Zapatista patriotic discourse and its relation to the PRI.

Peace talks in the cathedral

Thanks to the elegant prose of the communiqués signed by Subcomandante Marcos, the mystique surrounding the identities of the masked guerrillas and their semi-mythic histories, or the non-vindictive character of the EZLN, which treated its enemies with great respect (on 16 February the Zapatistas freed the hated General Castellanos Dominguez, who admitted to having been treated very well during the 44 days of his capture), by the time they entered the cathedral of San Cristóbal on 21 February the Zapatistas already attracted the attention of the national and international media. The cathedral was surrounded by thousands of indigenous Zapatistas, members of NGOs and the Red Cross, police, photographers, journalists and TV crews, who patiently waited the arrival of the EZLN *comandancia*. Referring to the publicity and support the Zapatistas had received by then, a Colombian *guerrillero* commented with bitterness:

they fought for twelve days and occupied a handful of municipalities ... we have been fighting for 30 years, we are controlling large parts of the national territories ... and even so, nobody is interested in our actions, while their action have created a furore around the world. (quoted in Le Bot, 1997, p. 115; my translation)

The setting of the cathedral was theatrical. The Zapatista *comandancia*, the 20 indigenous commanders, members of the Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee arrive, all with their faces covered with the black *pasamontañas* (ski-masks), and the subcomandante dressed in black, unarmed but with the cartridge-belts crossing his chest, and they spread out along the long conference table. First to talk is the undisputed intermediary, Bishop Ruiz, who

sets the context of the historical moment. Then it is the turn of the comandantes, who make clear that they are proud to be indigenous, *Chiapanecos* and Mexicans, that they took up the arms as a means of defence, that they could no longer submit to being the excluded and marginalised of the nation, to die from hunger and curable diseases, and that the Zapatistas were seeking political solutions to their demands. Marcos takes from the hands of Comandanta Ramona a folded Mexican flag and unfurls it. It is now his turn to speak. He says that he speaks on behalf of the clandestine Revolutionary Committee, and that the Zapatistas are not there to apologise but to prioritise the 'true word' over the volleys of arms (Monsivais, 1999). The atmosphere is spectacular, magnetic, and devout with the use of patriotic symbols and words which leave little room for criticism. The message is clear and understood by all; the Zapatistas are not 'professionals of violence' and are not orchestrated by foreign interests. Manuel Camacho, the government's representative, had no option, and perhaps no reason, to do otherwise than agree; 'the EZLN', he says, 'is an organisation of Chiapanecos, Mexicans, in their majority indigenous' (quoted in Monsivais, 1999, p. 29; my translation). That was the official end to the conspiracy theories previously expressed by President Salinas. The peace dialogues, which, as the Zapatistas have admitted, gave the movement the opportunity to come in contact with 'civil society', and through this contact to rethink the political ideas and strategies of the organisation, ended on 2 March. The government presented two declarations on the national situation and 32 proposals for the solution to the problems in Chiapas, which the EZLN agreed to take back to its territories for discussion and scrutiny by the indigenous communities (Ramirez-Cuevas, 1998).

The cathedral dialogues marked the beginning of a new relationship between the government and the Zapatistas that seemed to meet the needs of both parties at that stage. On the one hand the EZLN had very little military power to pursue armed struggle and was increasingly encircled in the jungle and the mountains by the Mexican army. What the Zapatistas urgently needed was a process that would allow them to stop the militarisation of their struggle and avoid military annihilation. The EZLN thus started gradually abandoning the public defence of the armed path to democratisation, and shifted its emphasis to civil society as a site of struggle. On the other hand the government had by that time realised that the Zapatistas had managed to get the attention and support of sectors of

the Mexican and international communities. Crushing the rebellion by military means would provoke strong reactions and would damage the 'democratic' façade of the PRI. The government needed to avoid further complications of the Chiapas problem and contain the rebellion. Accepting the Zapatistas as an interlocutor was a good opportunity for the government to demonstrate its 'democratic' character, and take a step further to incorporate the Zapatistas in the system. The new relationship established between the EZLN, and its importance for the government, as I will explain later, would emerge after the appearance of the Revolutionary Popular Army (hereafter: EPR) in 1996.

Almost a month after the talks in the cathedral, Mexico was again in political turmoil. On 23 March Luis Donaldo Colosio, the presidential candidate of PRI, was killed during a meeting in Tijuana. The assassination, which was immediately classified as a political crime despite the claims of the arrested perpetrator of having acted for personal reasons, sparked a new war of positions. For its part the Mexican right through its representatives accused the EZLN of cultivating and inciting a climate of violence, a campaign that did not, however, gain ground since the incident was treated by the press as related to warring interests within the PRI. The EZLN's view was similar. In a communiqué dated 24 March, the subcomandante attributed the assassination to internal conflicts of the governing class and the attempt of factions within the PRI to initiate a military operation against the Zapatistas (Montemayor, 1997). By that point, the EZLN had managed to challenge the hegemonic position of the PRI in important aspects and had entered the political arena as a non-parliamentary political force.

The convention of Aguascalientes

An atmosphere of increasing mistrust between the two parties, and the continuing militarisation of Chiapas, on 10 June the Zapatistas rejected the government's peace proposals and issued the *Segunda Declaración de la Selva Lacandona* ('Second Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle') in which they urged the independent political parties to form a transitional government and called on the civil society to organise a Convención Nacional Democrática to draw up a new constitution (EZLN, 1994b), thus expressing the reformist character of their political agenda.

Encircled by thousands of federal troops in the jungle, and given all the problems that such a military blockade imposed on the local

population (harassment, fear, prostitution, alcoholism, etc.), the EZLN had, indeed, no other option than to rely on civil mobilisations for the relief of the situation. On 5 August the Zapatistas organised what they called for in the Second Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle, the *Convención Nacional Democrática* (hereafter: CND) or, according to Marcos, 'the celebration of broken fear' (quoted in Monsivais, 1998, p. 50; my translation). The CND lasted five days with the participation of about 7,000 people: activists, members of various political and civil organisations and NGOs. The meeting took place in Guadalupe Tepeyac, a hamlet in the heart of the Lacandona jungle which was symbolically named *Aguascalientes* to commemorate the convention of the revolutionaries of 1914 in the city of Aguascalientes.

The *Aguascalientes* in Guadeloupe Tepeyac, an area inhabited by the Tojolabales, known for their architectural skills, was constructed in such a way that the wooden buildings, when seen from above, formed the shape of a snail. And the auditorium purpose-built for the convention, with its wooden structure and white plastic roof, resembled a boat. 'Welcome aboard' were the first words of Marcos to the participants, and the national delirium began: 'we expect in the CND to find somebody to whom we can hand over this flag, the flag that we found abandoned in the palace of power ... so that all the Mexicans can make it theirs, so that it will again become the national flag' (quoted in Monsivais, 1999, p. 50; my translation). There were discussions related to a peaceful road to democratisation, indigenous rights, the role of civil society, the formation of a national project, and so forth. On the last day, during a press conference, Marcos was asked if he would ever take his *pasamontañas* off. 'If all of you want me to I can do it right now', he replied. There was a brief silence. 'No, no, don't take it off', shouted the crowd. With this second spectacular event the Zapatistas demonstrated that the way to the democratisation of Mexico was passing through the Lacandona jungle. And Marcos became a revolutionary idol now targeted not only by the Mexican and US intelligence, but by marketers and advertisers too.

National elections and economic crisis

On 21 August 35.5 million Mexicans turned out and elected Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de Leon, candidate of the PRI, as president of the republic. In second place was the right-wing Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) and in third place Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD). In Chiapas the PRI also took first

place followed by the PRD and the PAN. Some political analysts and intellectuals leaning towards the PRI (and PAN) argued that the result showed the trust Mexicans had in these institutions, and attributed the defeat of the Mexican 'left' (PRD) to its connection with the EZLN and the fear that the latter provoked in the middle classes. Alternative explanations talked of demagogic propaganda, the pressure on *campesinos* by the *caciques* (rural elite), fraud wherever this was possible, and the use of a very expensive electronic engineering. Zedillo himself, in a moment of reflection, would later admit, 'my triumph was unfair but legal' (quoted in Monsivais, 1998, p. 55; my translation), and promised to find a solution to the Chiapas problem through dialogue and negotiation. At the end of September the General Secretary of the PRI was assassinated in Mexico City.

There was another meeting of the CND at the beginning of October. The EZLN denounced the military provocations in the jungle, the construction of a military circle by the federal army, the lack of will on the part of the government for a peaceful solution and announced the suspension of any talks with the government. On 19 October, passing along the ancient tracks in the jungle, the Zapatistas broke out of the military circle and peacefully established positions in 38 autonomous municipalities containing 1,111 autonomous communities. A few hours later the rebels withdrew into the jungle. The same day Mexico lived through one of its worse financial crises: the devaluation of the peso (by 40 per cent), followed by economic recession, highlighted by the disappearance of thousands of enterprises and a million jobs, and a marked fall in the standard of living for the majority of the population. The IMF, the United States and several other countries decided to rescue Mexico the following year with US\$50 billion in loans, guaranteed in part by oil reserves (Ortiz, 2001). The Treasury Secretary Jaime Serra Puche blamed the economic instability on the Zapatistas. The year ended with the EZLN and the federal government accepting the mediation of the Comición Nacional de Intermediación (hereafter: CONAI), presided over by Bishop Samuel Ruiz (Turcott, 1999).

Betrayal by the government

On 1 January 1995 the EZLN published the *Tercera Declaración de la Selva Lacandona* ('Third Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle') in which they called on civil society to form a movement for national liberation (EZLN, 1995). The Zapatistas had now completely abandoned any emphasis on armed struggle, and were directing their efforts towards organising civil society as a means of breaking out of

their encirclement in the jungle and pursuing their political aims. On the other hand, the Zedillo administration still seemed to be opting for a military solution to the Chiapas problem, aiming at the annihilation of the EZLN and the dismantling of its civil bases. On 9 February in front of TV cameras the president declared war on the Zapatistas. The Mexican army broke the ceasefire and launched an invasion into the jungle occupying many Zapatista communities. Thousands of indigenous fled their communities. In its advance the army spread terror and disarray, poisoning rivers, killing indigenous people and animals, burning houses, stealing food, raping women. The *Aguascalientes* of Guadalupe Tepeyac was destroyed and the Tojolabal inhabitants fled deeper into the jungle. Marcos too escaped, withdrawing into the jungle, and set up his headquarters in La Realidad, a Tojolabal hamlet. Previously the government had issued arrest warrants for Marcos and 19 other Zapatista comandantes, and many suspected collaborators were detained. President Ernesto Zedillo had failed to keep his promises (Ramírez-Cuevas, 1998; Ortiz, 2001).

That same day on a national TV programme, the identity of Marcos was revealed. 'It was like a game of peekaboo', wrote Alma Guillermoprieto, who as a journalist was invited to the de-masking (quoted in Taussig, 1999, p. 236). An official took an oversized slide of a ski-mask with a pair of large dark eyes in one hand, and a black-and-white photo of a young man with a beard and large dark eyes in the other. He then slipped the slide of the masked face over the photo of the unmasked face. The enigmatic subcomandante was revealed. His real name was Rafael Sebastian Guillén Vicente; he was 38 years old, had a degree in philosophy, taught in the Autonomous Metropolitan University, and was a militant of the FLN. The identification of Marcos, however, was the result of betrayal by an ex-member of the EZLN and not a success of the Mexican intelligence service, as the government wanted to present it. Marcos himself entertained the unmasking of his identity with a short comment, 'I am not so ugly, please don't disappoint my female admirers' (quoted in Levario Turcott, 1999, p. 98, my translation). In Mexico City 100,000 people protested against the military offensive and in solidarity with the Zapatistas. There were solidarity demonstrations across the country. The central slogan of the protestors was: *Somos Todos Marcos* ('We are all Marcos'). Apart from the government officials and some of the PRI-leaning press, nobody called Marcos by the name identified by the government.

Apart from devastating the indigenous communities in the jungle and revealing Marcos's identity, the government offensive had failed to weaken the Zapatistas, especially when the Mexican system was still shaken by scandals. In the same month the brother of the former President Salinas, Raul was arrested as the instigator of the assassination of the General Secretary of PRI in September 1994, and for maintaining connections with one of the main Mexican drug cartels. A month later, Carlos Salinas fled Mexico into voluntary exile, first in Canada, then Cuba and finally Ireland. In March the Law for Dialogue and Negotiation was approved and arrest warrants for EZLN members were suspended. In an effort to cut down on human rights violations the CONAI established civil 'peace camps' in communities that had been occupied by the army. The same month the *Comisión por la Concordia y Pasificación* (COCOPA) was established to help the government translate signed accords into legislation. Members of various political parties were to serve on COCOPA with three-year rotating terms (Ortiz, 2001). A new period of dialogue seemed to have been initiated.

Consultation and dialogue

The EZLN and the federal government returned to the negotiating table in April. The new round of talks took place in a small indigenous town in Los Altos of Chiapas, called San Andrés Larrainzar, renamed by the Zapatistas San Andrés Sacamch' en de los pobres. In August, continuing their efforts to nationalise their struggle and contact with civil society, Zapatista representatives travelled across the country to carry out the national *consulta* (consultation). The questions the Zapatistas asked the Mexican people concerned the future of the EZLN and issues of democracy. More than a million Mexicans responded. An international and youth *consulta* was also carried out that year. Interruptions and resumptions of the talks between the two parties marked the period that followed until November. The dialogues took the form of four working parties: indigenous rights and culture, democracy and justice, welfare and development, and women's rights. The government, however, was making every effort to impede the talks. On 23 October the general attorney of the state announced the arrest of Fernando Yanez Munoz, who was accused of being Comandante German. The EZLN declared its zone of control to be on 'red alert' and denied any relationship with him. A few days later Yanez was released. The year ended with the EZLN and the federal army on the verge of a military confrontation. In December the Zapatistas

were preparing to celebrate the second year of their insurrection by inaugurating four more *Aguascalientes* (cultural, educational and meeting centres) in the jungle and Los Altos. The government took the Zapatista movements for military preparations and an increase in militarisation was provoked (Montemayor, 1997).

The San Andrés accords

On the first day of 1996 the Zapatistas published the *Cuarta Declaración de la Selva Lacandona* ('Fourth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle') in which the EZLN, responding to the results of the national consultation carried out the previous year, presented its decision to support the creation of a civil political force that would not participate in the national elections and would not aim to take power in any other way (EZLN, 1996a). The Zapatista aim was to create a civil movement that would maintain its independence from the electoral system. On 16 February, after intensive consultation with its civil bases, and having crystallised a discourse with an emphasis on indigenous rights and constitutional reform, the EZLN agreed to sign with the federal government the first accords on 'Indigenous rights and Culture' in San Andrés. As Guerrero-Chiprés (2004) argues, the Zedillo administration preferred at that stage to follow a moderate approach to the Chiapas problem on the eve of launching Mexico as a valid commercial counterpart to Europe. The signing of accords with the rebels seemed to meet the democratic credentials demanded by Europe's political elites. The scenario did not change significantly that year, however. The refusal of the government to honour the accords, as well as the continuing harassment of indigenous communities, assassinations and arrests of indigenous activists by paramilitary groups and the federal police respectively, forced the Zapatistas to leave the negotiation table on several occasions. Amid Marcos's communication war and Zedillo's manoeuvres the EZLN organised in July the 'Primer Encuentro Internacional por la Humanidad y contra el Neoliberalismo' ('First International Encounter for Humanity and against Neo-liberalism'). About 5,000 people from 42 countries attended the discussions in the five *Aguascalientes* (Oventic, La Realidad, Francisco Gomez, Roberto Barrios and Morelia).

The same year, commemorating the anniversary of the Aguas Blancas massacre, the Ejército Popular Revolucionario ('Revolutionary Popular Army') made its first appearance in the state of Guerrero (Ramírez-Cuevas, 1998). The appearance of the EPR marked the beginning of a new era for the Zapatistas. As already mentioned,

the military weakness of the EZLN, as well as its alliance with the Mexican and international middle classes, had forced the movement to abandon the democratisation of Mexico by arms. The emergence of the EPR disrupted the negotiation process between the government and the Zapatistas, and the Guerrero rebels were soon persecuted and stigmatised. Although the EPR made clear from the beginning its solidarity with the EZLN, the latter repudiated the EPR's practices and military logic as illegitimate. At the same time, the government found the opportunity to establish a line on what kind of resistance it was willing to accept. With this move the Zapatistas had managed to survive as a legitimate radical movement at the cost of abandoning their revolutionary discourse. The government, on the other hand, had incorporated the Zapatistas as a legitimate adversary within the system, defining, at the same time, a new limit of toleration that would result in fierce military action against the 'bad' rebels of the EPR (Guerrero-Chiprés, 2004). In Chapter 5 I will discuss in more detail the relation between the EPR and the EZLN because it marks the complete abandonment of the defence of the armed struggle by the Zapatistas, and the negation of solidarity with other armed groups.

The Zapatistas in Mexico City

As mentioned earlier, a committee consisting of representatives of the legislative power was formed in 1995 in order to assist the executive to carry out constitutional reforms on the basis of the accords signed between the EZLN and the federal government. Although the proposal formulated by this committee, *la ley COCOPA* ('the COCOPA bill'), presupposed mutual respect by the two parties, the federal government raised several objections and demanded a number of modifications to the original formulation (Castro Soto, 2002). In January 1997, members of the EZLN met COCOPA in La Realidad where they rejected the counter-proposal of President Zedillo, and declared that they would not return to the negotiating table until the San Andrés accords were implemented. During the historical elections of 6 July 1997 the PRI, in power since 1929, lost its absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies, and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the left-wing candidate of the PRD, was elected mayor of Mexico City. For his part the Mexican president kept silent on his relation to Chiapas, avoiding on several occasions even mentioning the Zapatistas.

In July a Zapatista delegation travelled abroad for the first time to participate in the 'Second International Encounter for Humanity and against Neo-liberalism', held between 27 July and 3 August in

Spain. The event, however, that marked that year was *La Marcha* of 1,111 Zapatistas, representatives of their respective autonomous communities, to Mexico City in September. The Zapatistas travelled to the Federal District (DF) in order to participate in the second assembly of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) and in the founding of the Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (hereafter: FZLN) a political organisation independent of the EZLN and without aspirations to power, a political organisation, however, that would fail to develop into an urban movement, and would receive limited support mainly from university students.

The Acteal massacre

On 18 and 19 December 1997 President Zedillo was on a visit to Nicaragua where, in an interview on national TV, he assured viewers that there was no longer a guerrilla presence in Chiapas, that at the beginning of 1994, yes, there was 'a group', but since then the government had improved social conditions so that such events would not happen again. A few days later, on 22 December, a paramilitary group consisting of 60 indigenous *pristas* (supporters of the PRI), dressed in black uniforms and armed with machetes and AK-47 assault rifles, attacked the community of Acteal, municipality of Chenalho, in the region of Los Altos. The Tzotzil inhabitants of Acteal, known as *abejas* ('bees'), although they were Zapatista sympathisers, for religious reasons did not approve the use of arms and never participated in acts of violence. The paramilitaries found them praying in the church. Having been informed that an attack was imminent, most men had left to avoid confrontation. Those who stayed were mostly women and children. The assault lasted six hours, during which the paramilitaries pursued local people all over the mountainside, and into the river and caves, in order to make sure that nobody survived. A pregnant woman had her womb cut open and her foetus pulled out. The police patrolling the area refused to intervene. At the request of an indigenous to stop the bloodshed the reply was short and to the point: 'this is outside our remit' (quoted in Montemayor, 1997, p. 215; my translation). Similar answers were given by officials, who that night received a torrent of phone calls by people reporting hostilities in Acteal. The death toll: 45 – a baby, 14 children, 21 women, 9 men.

The Acteal massacre was undoubtedly the most brutal and numerous but not the first. Various paramilitary groups in Chiapas like Los chinchulines ('chitterlings'), Paz y Justicia ('peace and justice'), Mascara

Roja ('red mask') and MIRA ('Anti-Zapatista Indigenous Revolutionary Movement') were and are responsible for assassinations, rapes, intimidation and missing activists. These groups grew in strength, not just with the tolerance of but with coverage and active support from the federal army and police, and were and are maintained to carry out an unofficial, low-intensity war against the Zapatistas. Thus, the denouncing of the massacre by President Zedillo a day later as a 'cruel, absurd and unacceptable criminal act' (quoted in Ramirez-Cueva, 1998, p. 7; my translation) sounded rather hypocritical. The EZLN for its part accused the government's secretary and vice-secretary of commissioning the federal police to cover up the scale of the massacre, an accusation that appeared to have been well founded. For the Zapatistas the main culprit was President Zedillo, who two years previously had approved the federal army's counter-insurgency plans. The massacre, according to the EZLN, was a synthesis of various political, economic, social and military bodies of the Mexican state. Several countries denounced it. To date charges have been brought against 125 people, including several police chiefs and a *prista* mayor, but the investigation has not progressed in ascribing responsibility to civil servants in higher positions (Montemayor, 1997).

Consultation and violence

1998 had not been a particularly good year for the Zapatistas. Several autonomous communities had been attacked, 10,000 indigenous had been displaced from their lands, the CONAI had folded, and the relationship between the EZLN and the COCOPA had been dogged by strong disagreements. At the same time, together with the low-intensity war against the indigenous communities, the government launched an attack against foreign human right observers and activists in Chiapas. In February Dolores De La Vega (presenter of the programme *Hablemos Claro* on the anti-Zapatista TV Azteca) paid an unauthorised visit to the *Aguascalientes* of La Realidad. Later she recounted how a sizeable group of foreigners prevented her from carrying out her duties, and claimed that it was they who were making decisions for the indigenous. Her claims and declarations by the secretary of the government against the involvement of foreigners in the political affairs of the country, although repudiated by the majority of the intellectuals (Tarrazas, 1998), prepared the moral ground for what was to come. At the end of the month the Home Office deported a French priest, Michel Henri Jean Chanteau Desillieres, who had served as a parish priest in Chenalho, Chiapas

for 32 years, on the grounds that he was engaging in 'political activities'. In April Alejandro Carrillo Castro, commissioner of the National Institute of Immigration, announced that the Home Office was carrying out an investigation into the dioceses of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, under the accusation that the Centre of Human Rights Fray Bartolome de Las Casas was providing observers' documents to foreign citizens (Levario Turcott, 1999). Some days later a group of 120 Italian observers were expelled, 80 of whom were banned from returning to Mexico for the next ten years (Ortiz, 2001). A number of mainly Italians, Germans and Americans were deported that year as *personae non gratae* (Monsivais, 1999). At the same time, in order to make sure that there would be no foreign observers in the indigenous communities, the government imposed a regulation according to which international observers should have UN status and specified a number of conditions for obtaining a human rights observer visa (Jennings, 1998).

Facing growing isolation the EZLN decided, the following year, to organise a national and international consultation during the winter in an attempt to build new alliances with struggles throughout the country. The international consultation, unlike that of 1995, was to be restricted to Mexicans living outside the country. The issues would be 'Should Indians be included in Mexico's national project and take an active role in building the new nation?', 'Should peace be achieved through dialogue and the Mexican military returned to barracks?', 'Should the government obey the will of the people and abide by the results [of the consultation]?', 'Should Indian rights be recognised in the Mexican constitution with the integration of the San Andrés accords offered by the COCOPA?' These were the four questions that the 5,000 Zapatista representatives, equal numbers of men and women, in pairs, had to take to Mexico's 2,500 municipalities. Marcos promoted the consultation in his usual style: 'Here it comes! The Zapatista consultation! Not starring Sharon Stone, Leonardo DiCaprio or Gwyneth Paltrow! Brought to you by Yepa Yepa huaraches – the only globalised huarache!' (quoted in Ross, 2000, p. 300). In total 3 million Mexicans cast their vote in favour of the Zapatistas. The results were ignored by the Mexican government, which saw the Zapatista initiative as an attempt on the part of the EZLN to insert itself in the elections that were to come in the following year.

The low-intensity war continued targeting the Zapatista communities. In that year too all anti-Zapatista parties (namely, the paramilitary groups, police and federal army) did everything they

could in their attempt to erode the support bases of the EZLN. And the governor of Chiapas, Roberto Albores Guillén's, fury against the Zapatistas caused a headache even for President Zedillo, who preferred a more discrete annihilation of the rebels. For the third year in succession, the president failed to mention Chiapas in his State of the Union report. The paramilitary MIRA reportedly organised an anti-consultation brigade to prevent communities in the Cañadas from voting. The federal army mounted 'war on drugs' raiding parties to further malign the 'narco-Zapatistas'. Several attacks, beating and shootings of Zapatista activists were reported throughout that year while troops were despatched to autonomous communities on any possible pretext. At the same time a wave of desertions was threatening the Zapatista camp. The Mexican government had allocated many billions of pesos to the conflict zone to buy the allegiances of *campesinos* that had sympathised with the Zapatistas. The bribes came in various forms, ranging from farm machinery and cows, to roofing materials and basketball courts. The government's strategy seemed to work not only in buying *campesinos* but also in generating tension inside the communities between the Zapatistas and the *pristas*, and transforming the latter in the government's eyes inside the communities (Ross, 2000).

On 20 April students at UNAM occupied 40 schools of the university and began a strike that seemed unlikely to end quickly. The spark had been the rector's decision to raise tuition fees from 2 cents a term to US\$60 for the 270,000 students of the country's top higher-learning facility. The General Strike Council accused President Zedillo that, with World Bank complicity, he intended to privatise the national university. The EZLN immediately expressed solidarity, and in May dozens of students travelled to La Realidad to meet the Zapatistas in the EZLN's 'encounter with civil society'. The EZLN expressed its full support for the students but had decided not to involve itself in the student movement. Marcos, however, had a word of advice for the strikers: to insist on the satisfaction of their six demands before any negotiation with the government. Having experienced the fate of the San Andrés accords, the Zapatistas knew that a 'bad government' would not keep its promises. The Zapatistas were a significant source of inspiration for the students of the UNAM, as was the EPR. After 1994 the EZLN had become a voice and identity for the centre-left-oriented sections of the Mexican society, and the same was now true for the students.

The year of elections

'The rich and the powerful celebrate our humiliation while they lie to us and steal from the Mexicans ... the bad government just wants to keep us poor for another thousand years' (quoted in Ross, 2000, p. 333). This was how the Zapatistas welcomed the new millennium in La Realidad, where Claudia, the representative of the community, read a text repudiating the international frenzy and ballyhoo surrounding the millennium. Army advances into the jungle, paramilitary activity and the deportation of foreigners continued in the seventh year of the Zapatista 'war on oblivion'. A new element was the attempt to evict indigenous people from some areas of the jungle on the pretext that they were destroying it. In fact, such pressure reflected (and still does) Mexican and US economic interests in those areas, where the abundance of natural resources and rich biodiversity attract a variety of companies with interests ranging from the exploitation of petroleum to genetic engineering for commercial reasons. In March, the Pope appointed Tapachula's Felipe Arizmendi as the new bishop of San Cristóbal. The choice was not ideal for the Zapatistas but definitely not the worst possible either. In his first press release the new bishop stated: 'I do not go to San Cristóbal to destroy or complete' (quoted in Ross, 2000, p. 335). The right-wing clergy continued opposing the Zapatistas. The words of Juan Sandoval Iniguez, Cardinal of Guadalajara, were indicative of how some saw the whole issue: 'We have gotten rid of Raul Vera and Samuel Ruiz', he stated. 'Now it is time for the government to get rid of the Zapatistas' (quoted in Ross, 2000, p. 334).

Meanwhile, the strike at UNAM continued and the student revolt had entered the pre-election discourse with the left and right opposition both accusing Zedillo of inability to deal effectively with the worsening situation. For the Zapatistas the events in Chiapas and the UNAM strike were symptoms of the neo-liberal reality, and had shaken the Mexican political system. Marcos criticised the PRD intellectuals' positions and the contempt they expressed for the 'ultras' of the strike. In fact, the UNAM strike gave the Zapatistas the opportunity to radicalise once more their discourse which now, at least briefly, went beyond its pluralistic elegance to target in equal measure right- and left-wing intellectuals, the government and moderates' attitude as contributing to the moral lynching of the 'ultras' (Guerrero-Chiprés, 2004). After several attempts by the new rector's thugs to destabilise the situation in UNAM, on 6 February Zedillo sent in the Federal Preventive Police (PFP). For

the first time since 1968, a university was occupied by the military, this time in the guise of a new police force. The students arrested, 251 in all, were charged with terrorism and the clean-up squads whitewashed out murals of Che Guevara, Mao, Marcos and political slogans. 'The PFP', Marcos taunted from the jungle, 'is Zedillo's new excellence in education plan' (quoted in Ross, 2000, p. 337). In fact, the government had managed to crush the strike on the basis of the line established after 1994 – the line between acceptable radical struggles and unacceptable radical struggles. The pluralistic discourse of the Zapatistas, the emphasis of the movement on dialogue and consensus, and its abandoning of the armed struggle had been used by the government as a yardstick of what the system could tolerate. On the same basis that the rebels of EPR were criminalised in 1996, the radical sector of the students were now seen as outcasts, and a strong intervention was needed to eradicate them.

The event that marked that year, however, was the presidential election held on 2 July. The main presidential candidates (out of six) were three: the PRI's Francisco Labastida, the PAN's Vicente Fox and PRD's Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. Despite important differences from the other two candidates, in promising to implement the San Andrés accords and withdraw the military and PFP from Chiapas, Cárdenas's day was over, and everything showed that the fight would be between the PRI and the PAN candidates. A Labastida victory would mean the dismantling of the EZLN and the continuation of the PRI's repressive policy in Chiapas. Fox, on the other hand, was promising to solve the Chiapas problem 'in 15 minutes' without, however, offering any explanation of how he would achieve it. With the PRI engaged in its usual vote-buying tactics, Fox offering no alternative but empty promises, and Cárdenas facing students' accusations of his lack of support during the UNAM strike, Mexicans went to the polls on 2 July and elected PAN's candidate as president of the republic. PRI, the longest-ruling party in Mexican and world history, lost office. From that time on, the interlocutor of the Zapatistas in the government would be the ultra-Catholic former-manager of Coca-Cola in Mexico, Vicente Fox.

Fox did not, of course, solve the conflict in Chiapas 'in 15 minutes', but on 5 November 2000, just four months after his election, speaking to representatives from indigenous peoples of several continents, he announced his decision to send to the Congress of the Union a proposal for an Indigenous Rights and Culture Law drawn up by the COCOPA, which included, he said, the San Andrés accords 'in every

detail'. This would take place on 1 December. 'This will demonstrate, through actions, the willingness of my administration to establish the conditions for peace with justice and dignity in Chiapas, and to begin a great national dialogue', Fox argued (quoted in Román, 2000, n.p.). In December, Marcos sent a letter to Fox explaining the position of the Zapatistas and demanding that three conditions be met before the EZLN resumed dialogue with the government. The conditions were: the fulfilment of the San Andrés accords and the translation into law of the COCOPA proposal, the release of all Zapatista prisoners in Chiapas and elsewhere, and the demilitarisation of Chiapas. More specifically, in relation to the last condition, the Zapatistas demanded the closure of seven of the 259 military stations (Subcomandante Marcos, 2000). On 2 December, in a communiqué sent to the press, the Zapatistas made public their decision to send a delegation of the CCRI-CG of the EZLN to Mexico City in order to address the Congress of the Union and to argue for the value of the so-called '*ley COCOPA*'.

La Marcha Zapatista

La Marcha Zapatista ('the Zapatista march'), as the journey of the 24 indigenous commanders to Mexico City came to be known, a march whose organisation was exclusively in the hands of EZLN, was planned for February and March 2001. On their way to the capital the Zapatistas would pass through twelve states, some hostile and some friendly to their struggle. Saturday 24 February saw the beginning of the march. The delegates first assembled in four of the Zapatista autonomous municipalities in the Chiapas highlands before travelling, accompanied by the media and numerous national and international civil organisations, to the first planned major event: a rally in the town of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. In that first public appearance in more than four years, the EZLN told the biggest crowd in San Cristóbal's history that its march would be one of 'dignity' and not 'false peace' (SIPAZ, 2001). During the 15-day trip to Mexico's capital, the Zapatista march served as a crucible in which a great variety of voices and colours, languages and races melted. The Zapatistas made reference to the history, culture and identity of each place in which they spoke, identifying themselves with the public. They received presents and blessings, but also threats and menaces. They participated in ceremonies and rituals, and spoke with various sectors of society, as well as the national and international press. The objectives of the march were dialogue with civil society and

indigenous people, as well as with congressional representatives. The primary objective of the EZLN, however, was for the 24 commanders to enter and address the legislators in the Tribune of the Congress in order to speak for the importance of the COCOPA law. The Zapatistas would not meet Vicente Fox and the executive branch until the three conditions for resuming dialogue were met.

The focal point of public debate during that period was, of course, the Zapatista march. The EZLN succeeded in putting indigenous rights on the national agenda. The enthusiastic support on the part of organised civil society, however, contrasted with the diversity of reactions in Congress. While the PRD showed its support, the more conservative sectors of the PAN voiced their rejection. Distancing themselves from Fox, PAN representatives failed to reach a consensus with respect to the COCOPA proposal, revealing the splits that existed within their party. The legislators of the PRI, on the other hand, steadily changed their position as the EZLN gained support, showing themselves more open to the Zapatistas and to supporting the proposal. On 14 March, Jorge Espino, the Director of the Mexican Confederation of Industrialists (COPARMEX), declared that Mexican legislators would have to be 'out of their minds' to approve a law on indigenous rights and culture. Some businessmen also warned Fox that the law would rule out the Puebla-Panama Plan and other economic initiatives. The harshest criticisms, however, came from Senate hard-liners, who were headed by PAN Senator Diego Fernandez de Cevallos, who threatened to resign if the Zapatistas entered the Congressional Chambers (SIPAZ, 2001).

The Zapatista march provided the opportunity to the Fox administration to present a democratic façade and restore the Zapatista discourse by eliminating antagonism between the government and the EZLN. Fox thus stated, referring to himself and Marcos, that 'we want the same Mexico' (quoted in Guerrero-Chiprés, 2004, p. 253) and promised to do everything he could to achieve peace. The Zapatistas, on the other hand, made clear that their march was not a march for peace but one of indigenous dignity. The march gave the Zapatistas the opportunity to reinsert themselves as a radical force in Mexico and re-establish a revolutionary profile. Thus, shifting its discourse from defining the enemy as the PRI hegemonic role, the EZLN now targeted the system that had overlooked and humiliated them. At the same time, Marcos changed his position towards armed struggle, the EPR and other armed groups, stating that the EZLN recognised these struggles, and thanked them for providing the

conditions, in their areas of influence, for facilitating the Zapatista journey to the capital (see Guerrero-Chiprés, 2004).

For its part, COCOPA made intense but unsuccessful efforts to overcome resistance within the Senate. As a result, the EZLN announced that it would terminate its visit and return to Chiapas on 23 March, citing the intransigence of the political elite. At the last moment, however, they received a surprising message: the deputies had taken a vote and decided by 220 votes to 210 with 7 abstentions to allow the Zapatistas to enter the Tribune of the Congress. On 28 March, at about 11 am, the Zapatista delegates entered the Congress building, and with them more than 100 special guests, mostly members of the CNI. The session lasted five hours and was transmitted by three Mexican TV stations. The PAN deputies, who had opposed the decision to allow the EZLN delegates into the Congress, did not attend. Nor did Subcomandante Marcos whom many had expected to speak for the EZLN. Responding to the surprise that his absence had caused, Comandanta Esther, who was the first of the delegation to speak, explained:

Some will have thought that this Tribune would be occupied by *sup* Marcos and that it would be his task to give the central message of the EZLN. You see that this is not the case. Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos is this, a Subcomandante. We are the comandantes, those who give orders in general, those who give orders obeying our people. To the *sup* and those who share with him hopes and dreams we gave the mission to bring us to this tribune. They, our warriors, have fulfilled this task. (quoted in Rameil, 2001, n.p.).

Of the 24 commanders only four addressed the Congress. Comandanta Esther talked about the need for peace in Chiapas, and Comandante David insisted on the importance of the San Andrés accords. Comandante Zebedeo questioned the fact that the law is always on the side of the rich and powerful, and Comandante Tacho explained the meaning of tradition for the indigenous communities and expressed the hope that the COCOPA proposal would soon become law in the constitution. Everybody agreed that this was an historical moment for Mexico. For first time in the history of the country, and perhaps in world history, the commanders of a revolutionary army had entered the Congress of the Union in masks in order to address the legislators and explain their positions.

The EZLN's delegation reported back in the *Aguascalientes* of Oventic on the 1 April, where Marcos and other comandantes

outlined the results of their trip. The Zapatistas and the entire indigenous population of Mexico then had to wait for the vote of the legislators to ratify the COCOPA bill. On 25 April the legislators revised the constitution in relation to indigenous rights and culture after significantly modifying the initial proposal of the COCOPA. The Zapatistas and the indigenous had suffered a defeat. The new legislation was far from what the Zapatistas had hoped for. Notably the indigenous communities were not recognised in the new constitution as 'entities of public right' but rather as 'entities of public interest'. This means that the indigenous can be recipients of public policies, but are not 'subjects of right', participants in the organisation of the state (see Perfil, 2001). Issues of autonomy, indigenous culture and rights, and so forth, were severely restricted in the new constitution, and subjected to a number of conditions. Four days later Marcos sent a communiqué to the press, on behalf of the general command of the EZLN, in which he rejected as a joke the revisions to the constitution, and accused the legislators and the government of closing the doors to dialogue. The EZLN suspended any contact with the federal government and declared that it was not going to resume dialogue with Fox's government until the COCOPA initiative was recognised in the constitution (Subcomandante Marcos, 2001a). That was the last communiqué 'from the mountains of the Mexican southeast' for more than a year. The Zapatistas declared that they would continue 'the resistance and the rebellion', and entered a period of prolonged silence. A few months later, on 15 June, in a summit meeting in El Salvador, Mexico and the other seven Central American republics approved a package of economic development with the name Plan Puebla-Panama (PPP). The PPP seeks to create the necessary infrastructure in an effort to persuade large corporation to invest in the area. The Zapatistas and all the indigenous organisations of Central America have strongly opposed the PPP, which involves the destruction and exploitation of *campesino* and indigenous communities and their natural resources (CIEPAC, 2002).

'CHECK!' ... BUT NOT 'MATE'

Since their first public appearances the Zapatistas and the EZLN have been an important force in Mexican politics, and their influence has gone far beyond national borders. They have won victories and suffered defeats, but the 'war on oblivion' is still not over. I conclude

this brief journey through these eight years of Zapatista struggle and resistance with a story once narrated by Marcos, a story that shows the effect of the Zapatistas rebellion in Mexico and, perhaps, the whole world:

A group of players is absorbed in an important game of high school chess. An indigenous approaches, observes and asks what it is that they are playing. Nobody replies. The indigenous approaches the chessboard and contemplates the position of the pieces, the serious faces and the players' frowns, the anxious attitude of those around it. He repeats his question. One of the players takes the trouble of replying. 'It is something you cannot understand; it is a game for important and wise people.' The indigenous stays silent and continues observing the chessboard and the moves of the opponents. After a while he poses a question: 'And why are you playing if you know who is going to win?' The same player who replied before tells him: 'You will never understand, this is for specialists, beyond your intellectual group.' The indigenous does not say anything. He continues looking for a while and then he leaves. After a while he comes back bringing something with him. Without saying anything he goes up to the table on which the game is being played and puts an old boot full of mud in the middle of the chessboard. The players, interrupted, look at him with anger. The indigenous smiles mischievously and asks: 'Check?' (quoted in Rodríguez Loscano, 2001a, p. 5; my translation)

2

Theories and Perspectives on the Zapatista Insurrection

For Marx, revolutions are the locomotive of history. But perhaps things are different. Perhaps revolutions are the way by which humanity, that travels on this train, pulls the emergency brake.

Walter Benjamin, 1975

You can disagree with the way but not with the causes.

Subcomandante Marcos, 1 January 1994

Since their first public appearance in January 1994 the Zapatistas have been at the centre of political analysis from a number of perspectives. Academic theories of various political currents as well as radical perspectives outside the academy have sought to explain, support and elucidate aspects of the sometimes contradictory Zapatista praxis, and its often elusive and ambivalent discourse. The refusal of the movement to 'define' itself politically and its flirting with a diversity of political terms and practices have allowed for a plethora of 'readings', which vary along a spectrum ranging from total jubilation to overt hostility. Consequently, and with the focus of analysis on both the discourse and praxis of the movement, the Zapatistas appear under labels such as 'revolutionaries' and 'postmodern guerrillas', but also 'armed reformists' and 'social democrats'.

Without exhausting all the existing and possible 'readings' of the Zapatistas the purpose of this chapter is to set the broader and diverse theoretical context within and through which the Zapatistas as a political movement exist, by reviewing four of the more commonly employed approaches to the Chiapan revolt: the Gramscian approach, Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse, academic 'autonomist Marxist' perspectives, and non-academic left and radical left approaches. By doing this my main purpose is to identify what I consider to be two common problems characterising these readings, and define, at the same time, the aims of this book. The first is the inability of these perspectives to account theoretically for the unique character of the Zapatista rebellion, resulting in a

theoretical trivialisation of the movement, and the accompanying lack of discussion of the subjectivity of the Zapatistas and those found in a condition of political proximity with the movement. The second problem is the uncritical approach to the Zapatistas, at least in academic readings, that often results in an idealisation of the movement and prevents a critical reflexive process of its practices and ideological tenets.

GRAMSCIAN APPROACH

According to Gramsci (1948–51) and his 'Prison Notebooks', departing from the traditional Marxist hierarchy between economy and the state, it is the transformation of the ruling class into a state rather than the seizure of economic power that is the highest moment in the political struggle for 'hegemony'. Gramsci advanced the notion of the 'integral state' in such a way that it was expanded as the synthesis of the political society and the 'civil society'. In his own words: 'the general notion of the state includes elements which need to be referred back to the notion of civil society, in the sense that one might say that state = political society + civil society' (p. 263). 'Hegemony', a concept central to Gramscian thought, is achieved when the ruling class has succeeded in dominating the oppositional forces, and in winning the passive or active consent of its allies (Torfing, 1999). The supremacy of a social group or class manifests itself in two ways: 'domination' and 'moral and intellectual leadership'. Although domination is realised essentially through the coercive apparatus of the state, intellectual and moral leadership is objectified in, and mainly exercised through, civil society – the ensemble of educational, religious and associational institutions – and it is this latter that constitutes hegemony. Hegemony is attained through the ways by which the institutions of civil society operate to shape the cognitive and affective structures through which people perceive and evaluate reality, and it is thus ethico-political but with solid economic roots (Femia, 1981). The state for Gramsci is not understood as a repressive apparatus but rather as the organic relation between political society and civil society, and it is through consent that the ruling class becomes a state and hegemonic, as opposed to the exercise of force.

Any discussion of the Gramscian idea of hegemony must necessarily include his concept of the 'historical bloc'. Although there are various interpretations of the meaning of this concept, it can be argued

that the historical bloc is, in fact, the joining together of two levels of analysis: a theoretical level in which the concept describes the relationship between two areas of reality, the structure and the superstructure; and a concrete level, which describes the linking of these two areas in real society. The unity of the process of the real, 'structures and superstructures', Gramsci (1948–51) wrote, 'form a historical bloc' (p. 366). In order to become hegemonic the ruling class has to construct an historical bloc, which links the ethico-political with the economic. The historical bloc, however, cannot be reduced to a mere political alliance since it assumes a complex construction within which there can be a number of sub-blocs, each of these containing different elements and potential contradictions. The historical bloc can produce various political blocs made up of different combinations of political allies, which maintain its overall configuration (Sassoon, 1987).

The way in which a given historical bloc is articulated is organically related to the ability, or inability, of a new class to construct an alternative historical bloc, and consequently become hegemonic. Moreover, since the historical bloc is specific to the national context, albeit in an international conjuncture, special emphasis is placed on the national dimension as the basic unit of analysis. For an alternative bloc to be constructed, though, and for a new social class or group to become hegemonic, the formation of a 'collective will' is necessary, 'the attainment of a cultural-social unity through which a multiplicity of dispersed wills, with heterogeneous aims, are welded together with a single aim, on the basis of an equal and common conception of the world, both general and particular' (Gramsci, 1948–51, p. 349). And the formation of a common will is itself the product of an 'intellectual and moral reform', which breaks up the ideological terrain and rearticulates the ideological elements. Finally, it should be stressed that, for Gramsci, intellectual and moral reform should aim at the formation of a common will with a national-popular character, and it is exactly the articulation of the national-popular elements that allow a particular class, in its attempt to become hegemonic, to express the interests of the nation (Torfing, 1999).

The work of Gramsci has exerted a great influence in Latin America, and has served as a vehicle, a catalyst for renewing the discussions and strategies of the Latin American left. With the focus of discussions on a critique of orthodox Marxist notions such as 'paradigmatic class ideology', the left was moving towards a non-essentialist understanding of the latter and a new approach to the relationship

between culture and politics for organising resistance. The idea of hegemony as a process of articulation of different interests for a gradual project of social transformation, the search for national reality, the revolution not as an insurrectional act of seizing power but rather as an intellectual and moral reform, together meant that Gramscian thought 'saved' the Latin American left from eventual rupture during 1980s, and gave it new directions (Dagnino, 1998). After the 'defeat' of the armed struggle strategy, and with the influence of Gramsci's theory, the resistance of the left to authoritarian regimes focused on the notion of democracy, rather than that of revolution, as the unifying concept through which theoretical tenets and struggles were to be construed. And Gramscian concepts such as 'national-popular', 'transformism' and 'passive revolution' became resources for analysing experience like populism and the role of the state in configuring Latin American societies, to which traditional Marxism could not contribute adequately. Indicative of the influence of Gramsci's ideas in Latin America is the fact that his name is found in the intelligence report presented to the seventeenth Conference of American Armed Forces in Mar del Plata in 1987. The report acknowledges Gramsci's importance for the international communist movement, and adds that, 'for Gramsci, the method was not the revolutionary taking of power but the cultural subversion of society as the immediate step in order to reach power in a progressive, peaceful and permanent way' (quoted in Dagnino, 1998, p. 38). It is not surprising, therefore, that Gramscian ideas and concepts are used widely by Latin American authors for theorising the Zapatista movement.

The Gramscian approach to the Zapatistas focuses, as would be expected, on hegemony, together with an emphasis on identity, and pluralism already implied by hegemony. Hegemony, the argument holds, as the construction from below of a collective will, expresses the search for 'a unity within diversity' of autonomous collective political subjects. Kanoussi (1998) begins her Gramsci-inspired reading of the Zapatistas by making clear the difference between two kinds of identity models. On the one hand, an essentialist model where identity is seen as something fixed and stable, and on the other, a model that approaches identity as temporal, incomplete, in a process of continuous construction through practices and positions of difference. In this latter case, the identities are constructed within histories and specific political struggles and for this reason they are part of the struggle for hegemony of what Gramsci called the subaltern groups. This is the case of the subaltern indigenous

Zapatistas who, through the voice of the Subcomandante Marcos (seen as the Gramscian 'organic intellectual'), and since the 'First Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle', express this 'new identity' in construction in terms of its relation to politics and power, or in other words, in terms of hegemony.

Key concepts in the Zapatista discourse such as 'democracy' and 'equality' demonstrate the attempt to construct a new ethico-political space and a collective will with emphasis on identity and democracy; that is, with an emphasis on pluralism, or what the Zapatistas call 'a world where many worlds fit'. And this is exactly what makes obvious the national (popular) character of the indigenous struggle, which comes to challenge the hegemony of the dominant political system, proposing an alternative national political project based on the indigenous principle of 'command obeying'. The Zapatistas are seen as a response to the project of development imposed on Mexico by neo-liberalism and large multinational companies, incarnated in NAFTA, with the consent of the Mexican government. Consequently, the argument goes, their discourse and practice aim to produce the conditions of possibility for the actualisation of modernity. And modernity here means the elimination of all forms of racism and respect of all human rights (Aragones, 1998). In the same line, Machuca (1998) argues that the Zapatistas, with their democratic claims, the promotion of networks, the emphasis on civil society as interlocutor (national and international) and 'the harmonic combination of the contradictory', namely the liberal, social-democratic and socialist elements of the movement, aim at a democratic recuperation of the processes of globalisation, towards a democratic socialism and a pluralist hegemony. The latter, Machuca (1998) argues, is not characterised by homogeneity, unity, but rather by points of agreement of a variety of social relations, and aims to confront the hegemonic unity of the Mexican state-party.

The Zapatistas derive their moral authority mainly from the fact that they do not wish to take power but rather to produce the social, cultural and political conditions that will allow the re-creation of identity and the exercise of sovereignty by civil society (Betancourt, 1998). This refers to a gradual taking of the control of the state by the institutions of civil society which, in turn, presupposes the transformation and restructuring of the institution of the state itself, and therefore, of the relationship between the state and society (Machuca, 1998). This is, in fact, the main argument that all Gramscian authors make in reading the Zapatistas. The aim is a

pluralistic, democratic and extended state in which civil society has power according to the 'command obeying' principle. This in turn is put in action through 'mechanisms' of direct democracy such as the national consultations carried out by the Zapatistas. Finally, in order to achieve this transition to democracy, the taking of power on the part of civil society, the Zapatista struggle has to eliminate the military logic that prevails in political relations in Mexico and bring the battle to the field of ideas, confronting the totality of ideas that keep the state together. This is a strategy, in other words, that echoes Gramsci's distinction between a 'war of manoeuvre' and a 'war of positions' (Machuca, 1998; Slater, 1998).

LACLAU AND MOUFFE'S THEORY OF DISCOURSE

Starting with a Gramsci-inspired critique of structural Marxism, Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) project was to develop a theory for a 'radical and plural democracy' that would avoid the pitfalls of Marxist theory and its assumed closeness and essentialism impregnated with the danger of totalitarianism (Townshend, 2002a). Although in the work of structuralists, like Althusser, Balibar and Poulantzas, Laclau and Mouffe could recognise an attempt to do away with the idea that the form and function of the superstructure are determined by the economic base (epiphenomenalism); they, however, argued that the reduction of the plurality of superstructural phenomena to the contradiction between social classes at the level of production (class reductionism) was still present in the work of these authors. The Gramscian ideas discussed in the previous section provided Laclau and Mouffe with inspiration and analytic categories in their attempt to fight what they thought of as the essentialist tenets of Marxism, like 'economism' (epiphenomenalism and class reductionism) and 'class consciousness', and develop their alternative political project based on the concept of hegemony (Torfing, 1999). The Gramscian notions of collective will and hegemony implied, for example, that the subject of political action could no longer be identified with social classes, and that ideology, rather than an epiphenomenon of relations of production, could be seen as a 'totalising' form which possessed a 'materiality' and as constructed through the practice of articulation. In other words, ideology could be seen as an outcome of hegemonic struggles that derived from an antagonism found at the heart of social relations (Torfing, 1999; Townshend, 2002b).

Having demonstrated the essentialist character of Marxist theory and that hegemony for Marxists was a politically authoritarian response to the problem of contingency, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) went on to develop their own democratic theory of hegemony. To do so they drew on poststructuralist philosophy, Lacanian psychoanalysis and the linguistic philosophy of the later Wittgenstein, developing, in this way, a discursive approach that led them to the conclusion that the external world is discursively constructed and nothing has a meaning outside discourse (Townshend, 2002a). For Laclau and Mouffe (1985), in the modern world there is an irreducible (to the logic of discourse) field of surplus meaning (the 'field of discursivity') which provides the conditions of possibility and impossibility for a partial fixation of meaning, and, therefore, makes possible the process of articulation of a multiplicity of discourses. Articulation, on which hegemony is based, is the process, or the discursive practice, through which 'floating signifiers' (e.g. 'equality') are turned into moments within a discursive totality, into discourses. Any discourse, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue, 'constructed as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre' (p. 112), can only partly fix the meaning of the signifiers and expel the surplus of meaning-creating 'nodal points'. Discourses, thus, are hegemonically (that is, politically) constructed through the process of articulation and they form stable social practices and discursively created identities or subject positions. However, the partial fixity of meaning contained in the discourses is always prone to subversion with the possibility of the meaning of the signifiers becoming dislodged (Townshend, 2002a).

Hegemony is thus seen as the expansion of a discourse, or set of discourses, into a dominant horizon of social orientation and action by means of articulating unfixed elements into partly fixed moments. The formation of the Gramscian 'expansive hegemony', as opposed to the conservative 'transformist hegemony', is basically 'metonymic', and 'its effects always emerge from surplus of meaning which results from an operation of displacement' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 141). Political forces might produce a metonymic sliding which provides the conditions of possibility for a stronger hegemony based on a metaphorical unity. Further, although the expansion of a hegemonic discourse necessarily entails closure, the latter can never be fully achieved because of the presence of antagonism. For Laclau and Mouffe (1985), antagonism is discursively or symbolically constructed and its roots are more psychological

than social, stemming from the need for 'fullness', the result of what Lacan thought as the trauma all human beings experience during the pre-linguistic stage of childhood (Townshend, 2002b). Antagonism, which 'situates itself within the limits of language and can only exist as a disruption of it' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 125), is what prevents the final 'suturing', objectification of society that discourses attempt to achieve. There are two types of social antagonism: popular and democratic. Popular antagonism involves the simplification of the social space and the division of the entire social space into two opposing camps. On the other hand, democratic antagonisms make the world increasingly complex and divide only minor social spaces as is the case with new the social movements, which seem to establish a variety of battle grounds (Torfing, 1999). In fact, the conditions for hegemonic activity occur when, given the openness of the social, the multiplication of democratic antagonism lead to a generalised crisis and a multiplicity of floating signifiers. Then, a 'master signifier' intervenes and retroactively constitutes the identity of the floating signifiers within a paradigmatic chain of equivalence (e.g. 'communism').

The struggle for hegemony is characterised by the conflict between two competing logics of 'equivalence' and 'difference', in which alliances constructed through 'chains' of equivalence can be disrupted through the logic of difference. Left-wing hegemony can be established only if the floating signifiers of 'liberty' and 'equality' are fixed within a democratic discourse through the multiplication of social spaces. Furthermore, left-wing hegemony has to unite all the struggles of both – the new social movements, championing issues of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, peace and the environment, and the workers' movements, creating a nodal point on the basis of radical and plural democracy (Townshend, 2002a, 2002b). Pluralism, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue, can be radical only if all groupings are based on the principles of their own validity, and radical pluralism can be democratic only if it is the very displacements of the egalitarian imaginary that have been the cause of the auto-constitutivity of these groupings. 'Hence', they argue, 'the project for a radical and plural democracy, in a primary sense, is nothing other than the struggle for a maximum autonomisation of spheres on the basis of the generalisation of the equivalential-egalitarian logic' (p. 167). And for advancing a radical plural democracy, it is necessary that relations of subordination be transformed into relations of oppression, that is, of antagonism and therefore seen as illegitimate. Laclau and Mouffe

(1985) do not renounce liberal democratic ideology, but call for an expansion and deepening of it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy.

We can follow Laclau and Mouffe's theory in action in a paper by Ortiz-Perez (2000) titled 'Radical Dissent and Revolutionary Discourses of the EZLN'. The author bases her analysis on the first four Declarations of the Lacandona Jungle (1994–96), which constitute, she argues, one of the main discursive registers through which the Zapatistas 'displace traditional meaning from hegemonic chains of signification into chains where signifiers would be more attuned to the multicultural ethnic character of the dispossessed' (p. 2). And it is in these same Declarations that the Zapatistas articulate their alternative to the hegemonic one, with political proposals replacing concepts such as racism, colonialism and capitalism with those of democracy, freedom and justice. The purpose of the analysis is thus to search through these four Declarations for a framework that can help in 'identifying the grounds on which Zapatismo establishes itself as an ideology and a political movement' (p. 1). This in turn entails searching for the master signifiers that articulate the Zapatista discourse and the Zapatista ideology, and relate the overall meaning to the concept of 'radical dissent', a signifier central to the Zapatista strategy that ensures the defence and prevalence of the EZLN and its discourse.

Reading the First Declaration, Ortiz-Perez (2000) argues that the discursive continuity of identification the Zapatistas produce between themselves and the marginal side of the triumphant Mexican military history, as well as the role of this side in forging the Mexican nation, confirm the presence of constitutive antagonism. Antagonism has opposed the role of the 'dispossessed' in the formation of the Mexican state, and the Zapatista discourse aims exactly to set the rules for a radical reading of the Mexican political history and claim back for the indigenous 'their share of national identity' (p. 5). It is in the Second Declaration, however, that we see radical dissent in action, with the dislocation of the discourse and images of war, and the articulation of new grounds that emphasise the role of civil society. Signifiers such as 'pacific' and 'civil struggle' establish a discursive complicity between the EZLN and civil society and take the conflict outside the movement's territorial boundaries. Furthermore, in the same Declaration, the master signifier of 'dignity' makes its appearance as the element that allows the Zapatistas to reject the paternalist

and populist methods of the Mexican governments and pursue their belligerence.

Signifiers such as 'command obeying' and 'for everyone everything, nothing for us' which appear in the Third Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle strengthen the emphasis on the creation of a new national project. At the same time, the Zapatistas manifest openly the indigenous cause of their struggle in their discourse linking it with the radical transformation of the Mexican nation. It is this coming together of 'patriotic' and 'nationalist' arguments with the indigenous cause, Ortiz-Perez (2000) argues, that makes the Zapatista claims and struggle stronger. This is a struggle for the integration of the indigenous people into the building of a national project that would equalise them 'with many members of the Mexican sovereign contract' (p. 10). And for the EZLN the notion of belonging to the Mexican nation is one of its fundamental principles. Moreover, in the Third Declaration we see the radicalisation of dissent with articulations such as 'the liquidation of the party-state' and 'the reform of the electoral law' (p. 12). Finally, in the Fourth Declaration the Zapatistas put together the struggle for democracy and against the 'bad government', and accommodate different social projects in order to create an inclusive world. The author concludes her analysis by granting the EZLN a postmodern status for combining the armed struggle with a postmodern discourse, and identifying an anarchist/utopian element in the Zapatista political proposal.

Another example in which we can see the influence of Laclau and Mouffe's ideas is the work of Harvey and Halverson (2000) on the women's struggle in Chiapas. After providing a brief introduction to the rebellion in Chiapas, which they also see as a struggle between a democratic 'civil society' and an authoritarian state for citizenship and democracy, the authors argue that, by choosing women's struggle for their analysis, they hope to 'highlight the importance of singular experience for developing more inclusive and open forms of discourse' (p. 153). Seeing any attempt to create a universal as necessarily entailing the exclusion of that 'which is not' (they refer to Derrida), and based on Laclau and Mouffe's assertion about the dislocated nature of all structures, and the unfixedity and instability of all spaces, the task is to understand how female emancipation does not produce a unified space for understanding oppression. 'Deconstructing' binary oppositions in feminist writings (e.g. strategic/practical interests, and epistemology/experience), Harvey and Halverson (2000) argue that what we need is to establish points of articulation between the two

polar extremes, namely, between the universal and the particular, and a recognition of the irreducibility of experience in the formation of collective identities towards a politics of difference rather than universality.

Given that the entire experience of women cannot be articulated within a collective identity, although collective identities are possible, there will always be some elements that cannot be brought into a common language. Harvey and Halverson (2000) conceptualise this remainder with reference to Derrida's notion of the 'secret', which they define as 'the portion of experience that escapes being categorised into universal narratives of identity, and, at the same time, cannot be purely limited to the individual' (p. 156). By removing the privileged positions of the purely universal and the purely particular, the 'secret' becomes the basis for the political remaining open, for all decisions to be made from the condition of undecidability, and therefore implies that there can be no single way of defining citizenship, democracy and feminism. Any definitions of these notions, Harvey and Halverson (2000) argue, must be articulated with others and always left open with an eye, as they say quoting Derrida, to the 'promise' of 'democracy to come'. And collective identities must be created through the articulation of our particular experiences in specific historical contexts so that citizenship, democracy and feminism are transformed from being 'transcendental signifiers' into 'floating signifiers' whose content is shaped by the political choices of social agents.

Within this framework, the women's struggle in Chiapas reveals the processes of articulation of multiple experiences of subordination amid competing discourses of citizenship, democracy and feminism. In the First International Encounter for Humanity and against Neo-liberalism, for example, feminist arguments were concerned with the relation between neo-liberalism and patriarchy, and how the two together prevent the development of plural forms of democracy. The indigenous Zapatista women who participated in that encounter, however, emphasised other aspects of their struggle as women; particular aspects concerning their exclusion within their organisations, and the need to have a voice and be heard. Women in Chiapas have sought to create new spaces of resistance by actively challenging 'community traditions' that subordinate them (alcohol abuse, lack of family planning, denial of women's inheritance, etc.), which are seen as political alliances between male traditionalist authorities and outside elites, while, on the other hand,

they have reinvigorated other traditions that are important in their attempt to overcome subordination (e.g. making traditional clothing, preparation of certain foods, etc.). Against universal feminist discourse Zapatista women thus demonstrate the validity of their own experience as women within a patriarchal society. And their experience and new spaces their struggle opens have expanded the meaning of Zapatista autonomy by inserting a gender perspective. Here lies, in fact, the significance of the Zapatista discourse, in the numerous ways in which indigenous women, men and children appropriate it for their particular shared struggles against injustice. Harvey and Halverson (2000) close their analysis by suggesting that future research should focus on how Zapatista women's singular experiences continue to create meanings and possibilities within the Zapatista movement, making the content of Zapatista discourse dynamic and changing.

ACADEMIC AUTONOMIST MARXIST APPROACH

Autonomist Marxist theory can be traced to the Italian *operaismo* of the 1950s and the concern for the workers' own needs and perceptions of their problems and the nature of their struggle (Aufheben, 2003). Developed and elaborated further in England and United States, autonomist Marxism has been critical of most Marxist traditions for being characterised by one-sidedness in their analysis by focusing exclusively on the mechanisms of capitalist exploitation and being unable to theorise working class self-activity (Cleaver, 2000 [1979]). Some autonomist Marxists emphasise the important role of the working class as the driving force in capitalist economy. Unlike traditional Marxist understandings of crisis, for example, as exclusively endemic in the workings of the capitalist system, some autonomist Marxists argue that the autonomous struggle of the working class is the important factor in bringing about crisis, and eventually forcing capital to reorganise itself in order to adjust to the new conditions produced by class struggle (Cleaver, 2000 [1979]). On this line of argument, for example, Hardt and Negri (1994) have shown that the Wall Street Crash of 1929 was related to the nature of the United States' economic system but, more importantly, was the result of an accumulation of contradictions caused by the impact of an intense working-class struggle following the October Revolution. The system thus had to incorporate class struggle as one of its components and

the 'state-planner' emerged in an attempt to control the working class through a series of mechanisms of equilibrium.

It is rather difficult to produce a coherent account of the theory of autonomist Marxism mainly because the theory seems to be in a constant dynamic process where concepts and ideas are continuously scrutinised and reworked, and because there are important differences in the focus and analysis among the various autonomist Marxist theorists. Recently, for example, Hardt and Negri's (1994) approach of the working class as the active subject that drives the development of capitalism forward has been criticised as inadequate. More specifically, Holloway (2002) argues that such an approach constitutes only a reversal of the traditional Marxism's equation. Where traditional Marxists see capital as imposing itself on a pre-constituted working class, this autonomist view sees the working class imposing itself on capital. In both cases, in other words, the relation between capital and the working class is seen as an external one, rather than a relation of interdependence. Despite these differences, however, it can be said that all (academic) autonomists share a political appreciation of the workers' capacity to act autonomously, a redefinition of the 'working class' that broadens it to include a number of social groups, emphasise the efforts of workers to escape their class status and become something else, and stress the importance of the production of value through autonomous political struggle (Cleaver, 2000).

Hardt and Negri (1994) argue that the internal force that constantly poses not only the subversion of the capitalist process of production but also the construction of an alternative is living labour. Labour, defined as a value-creating practice, functions as a social analytic that interprets the production of value across the entire social spectrum, equally in economic and cultural terms. Valorisation, they argue, provides a better framework for understanding, not simply the production of knowledge and identities, but of society and the subjectivities that animate it, to grasp, in effect, the production of the production itself. The concept of labour and value mutually imply one another, which means (beyond the notion of base-superstructure) that if labour is the basis of value, then value is equally the basis of labour. Marx's negative conception of the labour theory of value was developed along two axes, a qualitative and a quantitative one. The former focuses on abstract labour, labour as present in all commodities and as the substance common to all activities of production. The latter is the attempt to measure the value of labour and bring to light the capitalist process of valorisation, the law of

value that reveals the rationality that underlies capital's operation in the market. Marx, however, also presented an affirmative conception of the labour theory of value, a conception that focuses not on the capitalist process of valorisation but rather on the process of self-valorisation. From this perspective, the value of labour is seen not as a figure of equilibrium but an antagonistic figure, as the subject of a dynamic rapture of the system. The concept of labour power is thus considered as a valorising element of production relatively independent of the functioning of the capitalist law of value. Living labour constitutes the basis of the affirmative aspect of a Marxist critique since it not only refuses its abstraction in the process of the capitalist valorisation and the production of surplus value, but also poses the alternative schema of self-valorisation of labour. And the subjectivities produced in the process of self-valorisation of labour are the agents that create an alternative sociality (Hardt and Negri, 1994).

What counts as labour, as value-creating practice, Hardt and Negri (1994) argue, always depends on the existing values of a given historical context. Labour thus is not defined as any activity, but specifically activity that is socially recognised as productive of value. The historical and social specificity of labour means that the definition itself constitutes a mobile site of social contestation (e.g. attempts to establish women's caring labour as labour). Hence, one must be continually attuned to labour's contemporary socio-historical instances and the passage, in recent years, towards the 'factory-society', meaning that the labour process has moved outside the factory gates to invest the entire society. All society is now permeated through and through with the regime of factory, that is, with the rules of the capitalist relations of production.

First developed by Tronti in Italy (see *Aufheben*, 2003), the conception of the entire society as a factory implied that the industrial proletariat had lost its centrality in the capitalist process, and the extraction of surplus value was now possible from almost every social field. Autonomist Marxists, consequently, argue that we need to do away with the traditional concept of 'class' and the assumption that a given class is to be the 'bearer of socialism', and they go beyond traditional Marxism's identification of the working class with the industrial proletariat. Cleaver (2000 [1979]), for example, redefines the concept of 'working class' so that it includes all productive activity and all those whose work is directly or indirectly exploited in capitalism. For Cleaver, therefore, groups like peasants, students and

women are part of the working class for they derive their position in relation to capital, and because of their autonomous struggle against capital. Elaborating further on the idea of class, Holloway (2002) argues that we do not belong to any particular class but rather class antagonisms inhabit us. More specifically, his argument holds that class should be understood as a process rather than a fixed identity. We are and are not working-class in the sense that our labour is exploited, but at the same time our struggle is against this exploitation of labour, against being working-class. What follows from this is a conception of class struggle as the struggle against the 'class-ification' that capital is continuously attempting, the struggle against being working class, the struggle against dead labour.

Coming back to the Zapatistas, for autonomist Marxists (but not only them) Chiapas is just one of the targets of the global restructuring and reorganisation of capital that now attacks areas that previously were not central in the process of capitalist accumulation, and were characterised by rural forms of oppression and exploitation. Due to its rich biodiversity, vast natural resources and cheap proletarian army, Chiapas is, in many ways, a strategic arena in this geo-economic integration, but also the field of conflict and contradiction between two different modalities of accumulating capital, between two technological eras, each with distinct ways of organising the world and its resources. On this line of argument, Ceceña and Barreda (1998) argue that the conflict in Chiapas expresses more than a restructuring of the relationship between powerful landowners and the indigenous population: 'It is much more than a problem regarding effective land reform ... in Chiapas, a region of strategic economic and geopolitical importance, what is at stake is the rearranging of the material bases of the US hegemony in the world' (p. 57). Consequently, the Zapatista struggle is not simply about agrarian reforms and better, more generous policies for the indigenous populations, but rather it is a war waged by the working class against the expansion of capital and its devastating consequences. Similarly, with reference to the international context and an analysis of the material conditions, histories and position in economy of the indigenous communities, Lorenzano (1998) argues that 'the Zapatista experience is not a marginal or isolated event, but rather an indivisible part of the global recomposition of labour' (p. 133). This is part of a process that involves the destruction of traditional forms of class and 'class strata' and the emergence of new forms.

The expansion of capital is, in fact, a process characterising the whole of Latin America and is reflected in what Petras (1997) – not an autonomist Marxist – calls the ‘third wave’ of the Latin American left, characterised mainly by the resurgence of peasant movements through which class warfare against neo-liberalism is now waged. These new movements, which in fact overlap with structures of the ‘second wave’, are highly critical of the past and present, be it the structure, organisation and tactics of the guerrilla armies of the ‘first wave’, or the opportunism of the ‘neo-liberally’-oriented electoral left of the ‘second wave’ (e.g. the Workers’ Party in Brazil, the Party of Democratic Revolution in Mexico, etc.). With horizontally organised structures, transparent economics, few material resources but tremendous ‘mystique’, maintaining their political autonomy from political parties, and with a mixture of ‘legalist’ and direct action-oriented strategies, these movements fill the political space abandoned by the left electoral parties and urban trade unions, and demand democracy, land and cultural autonomy. The Zapatistas thus are placed among movements such as the landless peasants of Brazil (Movimento sin Terra – MST), the resistance of the Bolivian ex-miners and indigenous peasants, and so on.

Lorenzano (1998) argues that the Zapatista communities can be seen as a federation of workers’ communes that have autonomously organised themselves as a permanent army and, therefore, can be seen as a ‘community in arms’. The Zapatistas demonstrate the inadequacy of the traditional Marxist conception of labour if we think of the long and intensive work of self-transformation of the indigenous communities, the conscious social energy invested on the project of social transformation. A consideration of these processes brings us to what can be termed ‘labour in general’; a term that encompasses all the activity that creates the material social and intellectual foundations of the armed political Zapatista communes. In other words, the Zapatistas take us away from the weakness of labour (the breakdown of unions, solidarity networks, parties, etc.) to the potential of labour as the constructor of social alternatives. Furthermore, expanding the concepts of worker and labour helps us grasp better the importance of the organisations of ‘civil society’. The organisation of civil society of various kinds (human rights groups, women right groups, environmental groups, unemployed, etc.) consists of ‘new workers’, workers, in other words, with different levels of involvement in the process of production but whose labour is, nevertheless, exploited. And it is these new workers, who demonstrate a powerful capacity for

self-organisation, and self-valorisation, which the Zapatista discourse addresses, opening up the possibilities for the construction of a new collective identity among them.

For Lorenzano (1998) the Zapatista political project is not one of a purely indigenous character or restricted to peasant demands. On the contrary, what the Zapatistas aim at is a broader radical democratic transformation of social life and of the state. In a similar fashion, Holloway (2002) argues that the Zapatista struggle not only demonstrates the struggle of the working class against being working-class, the struggle against class-ification, but also the impact of the revolt on capital; the devaluation of the peso and the world financial upheaval of 1994–95 ‘makes it clear that the capacity to disrupt capital accumulation does not depend necessarily on one’s immediate location in the process of production’ (p. 149). In general, autonomist Marxists oppose the idea that the EZLN is a mere continuation of the Latin American guerrilla movements of the 1960s and 1970s, offering nothing more radical than a ‘national liberation’ politics, and rebut arguments that see the Zapatistas as a ‘reformist’ movement that has abandoned the concept of ‘class’ in its political analysis and the project of revolution. The EZLN, they argue, and the entire Zapatista movement, is an attempt to redefine and rethink not only the project but also the very practice of revolution without vanguard practices, class determinations and worn-out terminology (Lorenzano, 1998; Holloway, 2002).

Holloway (1998a) discusses and theorises the Zapatista insurrection and its political importance in terms of the concept (frequently used in the EZLN communiqués) of ‘dignity’. Dignity, he argues, was wrought in the Lacandona jungle when the Zapatista army, during almost ten years of preparation, developed an approach to revolution that resisted definition and was based on an open-ended view of the future. The Zapatista movement is a revolution with a small ‘r’, as opposed to the Revolution with a capital ‘R’ of the traditional Leninist conception. It is a revolution because ‘the claim to dignity in a society built upon the negation of dignity can only be met through a radical transformation of society. But it is not a Revolution in the sense of having some grand plan’ (p. 168). The concept of dignity can only be understood in its double dimension as ‘the struggle against its own denial’ (p. 169). In a world where more and more people are forced into an undignified existence, dignity, as a revolutionary category, is the struggle against the negation of itself. In other words, dignity is the struggle against exploitation, alienation

and fetishisation. Zapatista dignity and revolution are predicated one upon the other and both express a rejection of the 'this is the way things are' of capitalism. Furthermore, they both refuse to be defined in any conventional political terms because that would mean the end of their force. The state, Holloway (1998a, 2002) goes on, is pure is-ness, pure definition, pure identity, and this is what it demands from its enemies, to be defined, to be imprisoned within an identity. The struggle of the Mexican state against the Zapatistas since their first public appearance has been exactly this, a struggle to define, to classify, to limit. On the other hand, the Zapatista struggle has been the opposite, to break the closure, to refuse definition because 'the revolt of dignity is the revolt against definition' (p. 168). The concept of dignity, thus, 'is a class concept, not a humanistic one' (p. 180). It is part of the new language the Zapatistas invent in order to express their political proposal without using empty words.

Another aspect of the Zapatista revolt is discussed by Cleaver (1998a) and concerns the extensive use of the internet as a means of waging war. Since the first days of the war in Chiapas, the Zapatistas, in their attempt to disseminate their positions and ideas, came up against a boycott by the majority of the commercial media. The use of the internet has proved a powerful weapon for the Zapatistas, who have managed to make their voice heard and built solidarity networks around the globe. Through the use of the internet the Zapatistas have managed not only to spread information about the revolt but also to be in contact with people around the world and know what they think. In 1995, for example, the international consultation on the programme and practices of the rebels was carried out on the internet with the participation of 81,000 people from 47 countries (Cleaver, 1998b). What is also important is the information spread through the internet by people supporting the Zapatistas. Cleaver (1998a) argues that, unlike that of the commercial media, the independent information sent out by pro-Zapatista groups was massive and diverse, and its recipients could thus have a clearer, deeper and more critical view of the events. These cybernetworks, in fact, took the Zapatistas out of Chiapas through a flow of videos, news, books, CDs and other 'hybrid electronic products', and, at the same time, functioned (and still do) as shields that prevented the escalation of violence and the annihilation of the rebels by the government. Furthermore, these pro-Zapatista groups, through the searching, writing, translating and general work involved in the process of collecting and spreading information on the situation in Chiapas, have demonstrated and

increased their capacity for self-organisation and self-valorisation, and become participants in the Zapatista struggle.

NON-ACADEMIC RADICAL LEFT PERSPECTIVES

Apart from the academic theories presented so far, which tend to adopt an uncritical view of the Zapatistas, there are a number of critical, sometimes hostile, perspectives outside the academy that seek to shed light on various aspects of the movement and elucidate its contradictions and myths. In this section I group together some of these non-academic perspectives of the broader radical left and present their main arguments.

Perhaps the most uncritical perspective in the non-academic analysis of the Zapatistas is the Trotskyist one. *International Viewpoint*, for example, a magazine of a Trotskyist affiliation (USFI), has limited its engagement with the Zapatistas to publishing writings of Subcomandante Marcos and various articles of a rather descriptive and uncritical character. In fact, Trotskyists are usually detailed in their analysis of the international situation and Mexican politics, but they tend to see the Zapatistas in a rather idealised way. Apart from Rodríguez Loscano's (2001b; 2001c) uncritical journalistic accounts of the Zapatista *Marcha*, Husson (2001) has wondered about the future of Mexican politics in the absence of an independent left alternative to the 'profoundly neoliberal government', concluding his article by arguing that 'all these questions are posed or will be posed, but in a framework profoundly modified by the superb initiative of the Zapatistas'. Despite the fact that Husson (2001) comes very close to possible points of critique of the Zapatista politics and strategies, he seems completely unwilling to engage in any critique, even from a strictly Trotskyist point of view. Perhaps the uncritical approach of the Trotskyists is best summarised in the 'Resolution of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International' (2001), which concludes by stating that 'the Fourth International reaffirms its solidarity with the struggle of the EZLN, its March and its demands' without any mention of the reformist character of the Zapatistas and their demands.

A more critical approach comes from a quasi-Trotskyist perspective and the writings of the 'Socialist Workers Party' member Mike González. González (2000) provides a detailed overview of the land problem in Mexico since Zapata and Villa, and in Chiapas in particular, arguing that the exploitation and marginalisation of indigenous

campesinos by the local *caciques* (big landowners), the intermediaries working on behalf of the international capital, the complete lack of the most elementary social provisions, as well as the recent threat of the international capital (incarnated in NAFTA), have been the underlying causes of the Zapatista insurrection. The importance of the movement, according to González (2001), its 'symbolic power', is that it has placed the revolution on the political agenda again, has inspired movements (including the anti-globalisation movement) around the world, and has warned against the 'excesses of Stalinism', making clear that 'the emancipation of the working class must be the act of that class itself' (p. 4). Beyond these positive aspects, however, lurk the dangers of the Zapatistas' 'paradoxical' language and its pluralistic vision, whereby different visions and strategies for change can coexist without resolution. Furthermore – and this seems to be the main point of González's (2000, 2001) critique – the Zapatistas have failed to build an alliance with other movements and armed groups in Mexico, and, most important, have failed to elaborate a coherent political plan. The rhetoric of rights underpinning the Zapatistas' political language, and its implicit principles of law as opposed to class struggle, together with the denouncing of state power, make the egalitarian future envisaged by the EZLN communiqués appear uncertain. In the end, González (2000) argues, 'the issue is power, the control of society by the producers' (p. 13), and he implicitly suggests, through a reference to the consequences of the refusal of the peasant armies of Zapata and Villa to take over the state power in 1913, that the Zapatistas should rework their plans in relation to power, if history is not to 'repeat itself as tragedy' (2001).

A different approach, with (often), obvious signs of hostility, comes from a perspective appealing to anarchists, Situationists, left-communists and libertarians, and concerns not the weaknesses of the Zapatista political strategy but the edifice of the organisation as a whole, including Marcos, who is seen as a 'macho' *caudillo* (boss). *Wildcat* (1996) challenges what is presented by the Zapatistas and their supporters as the causes of the insurrection, namely the harsh living conditions in the indigenous communities. But neither the conditions in Chiapas – which are not so harsh compared to other Latin American countries, it is argued – nor poverty can explain revolts because otherwise 'most of the world would be in revolutionary ferment' (p. 30). Rebellions happen, the contributors to *Wildcat* argue, because people decide to rebel. However, the development of capitalist agriculture practically requires the elimination of the conservative

landlords, in terms of investments and capitalist innovation, and the breaking up of the estates. Historical experience shows, the argument goes on, that peasants can be used by politicians, usually under the slogan of 'Land and Freedom', to struggle against the reactionary big landowners towards a capitalist organisation of production, and the 'Zapatistas, with their vague ideology, are well suited to recuperate the class struggle in Chiapas, turning it into a campaign for national democratic reform' (p. 31). Along similar lines, Katerina (1995) argues that the Zapatista 'Revolutionary Agrarian Law', the most radical piece EZLN has produced, does not oppose private property or the market economy but, on the contrary, incorporates them. Despite its 'reformist', 'social democratic' character, however, this Agrarian Law, together with EZLN's law on women, labour, etc., express an 'explosive potential of social revolution' which has a universal dimension that transcends the local context.

One of the aspects challenged strongly by this perspective is what Geoffrey (1995) and Deneuve et al. (1996) call the 'myth of indigenous democracy'. The authors discuss the structure of the ancient Mayan societies, with their hierarchical and elitist organisation, and conclude that there is nothing in the history of the indigenous groups in Chiapas, suggesting that this 'innate and natural' (according to Marcos) democracy is rooted in tradition. The myth of the 'idyllic Indian community' is sustained in part by people's ideas of what community is, and by Marcos' rhetoric that arrives at the point of naively proposing this model of decision-making as a general model of government. The roots of indigenous democracy as experienced now is to be found in the work of the Maoist cadres which have undertaken the task of organising the indigenous communities in Chiapas since the 1970s. And it is exactly this Maoist influence, together with the Marxist-Leninist background of some of the leadership members of the EZLN, that can explain, in turn (according to Deneuve et al., 1996), the obvious separation between the EZLN and the indigenous bases as well as the Zapatista 'patriotic hysteria'.

For Deneuve et al. (1996) patriotic nationalism constitutes the second pillar of the EZLN, alongside communitarian democracy. 'More and more the Zapatistas present themselves as guardians of the values of Mexican nationalism. More and more, they are seeking alliance with sectors of the political class' (p. 11). The EZLN, the argument holds, forgets that the nation, which they so passionately defend, is a bourgeois invention (Geoffrey, 1995), and that Mexican

independence and its ideals, to which the Zapatistas proclaim their adherence, was a decisive moment for the impoverishment and proletarianisation of the indigenous people (Deneuve et al., 1996). The EZLN thus is not the first revolution of the new century but rather a movement of the old type which, having lost the support of the 'fraternal countries', finds refuge in an 'anti-imperialist patriotism' and respect for parliamentary politics. The latter is especially demonstrated by the close ties between the EZLN and the PRD, with the Zapatistas urging the indigenous people to vote for the PRD in 1994 (Katerina, 1995; *Wildcat*, 1996). It is, in fact, Katerina (1995) argues, through adopting the 'dominant nowadays democratic pluralistic ideology' that the Zapatistas have managed to survive. The nationalist character of the Zapatistas is further demonstrated, apart from the extensive use and reference to national symbols, in the strenuous denial that any Guatemalan Mayan Indians were involved in the insurrection, and the consequent subordination of the proletariat struggle to Mexican nationalism. Thus, the contributors to *Wildcat* (1996) argue that 'the Zapatista internationalism is restricted to talking to foreign journalists and appealing to liberals to put pressure on congress' (p. 32). And this is logical since one of the primary aims of the Zapatistas is the redistribution of land – something that does not require working-class solidarity.

In fact, Deneuve et al. (1996) argue, the patriotic nationalism expressed by the EZLN is especially attractive to some sectors of the middle class and the bourgeoisie. These sectors' nationalist sentiments are heightened due to the consequences of NAFTA for Mexico (e.g. the transfer of Mexican oil to American control), and they prefer not to conform to the demands of North American capitalism. The Zapatistas receive support from these sectors, which are included under the umbrella term 'civil society'. However, and given the fact that much of this support is based on the Zapatista rhetoric of peace, this is extremely fragile and would collapse if the situation in Chiapas were to move in a more radical direction. In relation to the civil society, *Wildcat's* (1996) criticism of Marcos is that what he includes under the concept of 'civil society' is more or less everyone, including the PAN, apart from the PRI (the text was written while the PRI was still in power). The PAN, however, and many of the proposals Marcos argues should be discussed and chosen democratically, has a clear neo-liberal agenda which means 'starvation and cholera',

and as such its proposal should be eliminated rather than discussed (*Wildcat*, 1996).

Another point of critique concerns the relation of the EZLN to women. In Chiapas, the living conditions for women are very harsh, and the birth rate is very high (an average of seven children per woman) with 117 women out of 100,000 dying in childbirth, and an extremely high child mortality rate. Women are often the victims of domestic violence, are more likely than men not to speak Spanish, to be illiterate, and are usually sold into marriage. Although the EZLN has been particularly attractive to young indigenous women, providing better living conditions and a more egalitarian life, Deneuve et al. (1996) argue that there is the danger that women, after having been used in the struggle, will be subordinated to the new general interests such as the increase in the birth rate advocated by the Catholic Church in the area. Women's commitment to the EZLN demonstrates the reactionary character of the indigenous communities, in contrast to the idyllic myth of communitarian democracy, and so raises important doubts about their emancipation. The integration of women into the military structure remains the surest way to 'diffuse the subversive potential of their choice to break with the past' (p. 8), 'nipping in the bud' any desire for transformation of the gender relations in the communities. And further, it is possible that the militarisation of women will replace their submission to the male-dominated community relations.

A more balanced reading of the Zapatistas is provided by the contributors to *Aufheben* (2000), who seem to share some of the enthusiasm and views of the academic autonomist Marxists while maintaining a critical view of the revolt. In fact, *Aufheben* (2000) criticises the academic autonomist Marxists for misrepresenting the class position of the indigenous Zapatistas and constructing 'a bizarre model which views the Zapatistas as representatives of the international working class' (p. 24). The indigenous in Chiapas, the argument holds, have been only 'partly and temporarily' integrated into the commodity economy, and as such were never fully proletarianised. In common with the academic autonomists, however, they share the view that there is a commune in Chiapas and stress the importance of the autonomous Indian energies in constructing an alternative. On the other hand, in common with the other non-academic radical lefts, *Aufheben* (2000) identifies the same sites of critique, namely the nationalist character of the movement, the army organisation,

the protagonism of Marcos, and so on. However, unlike the latter, there is a clear attempt to make any critique context-specific, and, at the same time, identify the good points of the Zapatista project. So, for example, it is argued that many of the EZLN laws are mired in a 'leftist bourgeois language', they are reformists in content and reflect the influence of Marxism-Leninism, but it is acknowledged, at the same time, that they have been produced through radical democratic processes, and represent 'a sophisticated attempt by the campesinos to start solving their own problems' (p. 19).

PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE READINGS OF THE ZAPATISTAS

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the reason I present how these perspectives and theories have been applied to the Zapatistas is in order to show the need to go beyond these readings, and develop a new understanding of the Chiapas rebellion. In this section, I will briefly discuss what I consider the main problems and limitations of the readings of the Zapatistas presented earlier, showing, at the same time, the directions this book will take. More specifically, I will focus on three main problems and limitations: (1) the subsumption of the Zapatista rebellion within ready-made theories, and the subsequent inability to account for what makes the Chiapas revolt different from other contemporary struggles; (2) the lack of an account (at best inadequate) of subjectivity as producing and being produced in relation to a radical political event; and (3) the lack of an elaborated critical assessment of the movement's discourse and practice.

Is there anything new about the Chiapas rebellion?

It is my position that all the readings presented earlier trivialise the revolt and fail to account for its unique character, which is what has made it so distinctive and popular. There is, among all the perspectives presented earlier, an obvious tendency to apply ready-made theories to the Zapatista rebellion, and approach it as a materialisation, an expression of certain theoretical frameworks. Consequently, the distinct character of the rebellion disappears or, at best, is poorly theorised and elucidated. The counter-hegemonic practices of the EZLN discussed by Gramscians, and Laclau and Mouffeans, as much as autonomist Marxist readings (to a lesser extent) and non-academic perspectives, fail to see that the Chiapas rebellion is something more than a case study that proves a certain theory, that there are elements

in the rebellion that force us to go beyond existing theories and invent new categories for understanding it. Consider Petras's (1997) argument that situates the Zapatistas within what he calls the 'third wave' of the Latin American movement. Although Petras' argument grasps an important aspect of the EZLN's character, it remains oblivious to the importance of the rebellion itself and of the ways the Zapatistas differ in important aspects from other movements of the third wave and, to a certain extent, escape it. Although these perspectives elucidate a number of aspects and dimensions of the movement, the unique character of the rebellion requires new theoretical frameworks that will allow us to grasp what is different in it, and the Zapatistas, and expand its implications and potentialities.

It is only in the autonomist Marxist camp that we can detect any attempts to go beyond mere direct application of a theory to the movement, and develop new theoretical categories and frameworks. One of the most sophisticated attempts to develop new theoretical conceptions on the basis of the Zapatistas is Holloway's (2002) discussion of 'changing the world without taking power', and his theorisation of 'dignity' as a revolutionary category. Holloway (1998b) has counter-criticism of his discussion of dignity as remaining a humanist category (*Wildcat*, 1997), arguing that his approach, unlike humanism, is a negative one. Instead of seeing dignity and humanity as something already existing, as is the case of humanism and social democracy, these are approached as existing in the form of being denied. However, and despite the fact that Holloway's approach elucidates and theorises certain aspects of the movement, it does not account for the totality of the rebellion as a unique political occurrence. What we need now is to go beyond those approaches and see (or approach) the Zapatista rebellion in its totality as a significant political occurrence whose effects go beyond its own territoriality and limitations, and expand in time and space. This will be the task I will undertake in Chapter 4.

What happened to subjectivity?

Subjectivity is another area that has been poorly discussed and minimally explored in the pro-Zapatista literature. However, almost ten years of preparation by the indigenous communities which preceded the rebellion, and the radical transformation of the indigenous social imaginary the revolutionary activity brought about (see Chapter 6), as well as the 1994 insurrection itself and its implications, offer a great opportunity for discussing not just

subjectivity, but revolutionary subjectivity as constituting and constituted by a radical political event.

The readings of the Zapatistas I have presented above tell us very little about the deployment, manifestation and production of subjectivity in relation to the insurrection, at best repeating well-known postmodern platitudes reducing subjectivity to a construction of a collective identity, and, at worse, ignoring subjectivity altogether. Writing from a Gramscian perspective, with the obvious influence of Laclau and Mouffe's theory, Kanoussi (1998) gives a short account of identity as being in a process of continuous construction through practices and positions of difference. The Zapatistas thus are seen as being engaged in a process of constructing a collective identity based on their histories and their political struggles, and in relation to the Mexican state, as a part of the struggle for hegemony. Kanoussi's account, however, is limited in scope, and does nothing more than state the obvious. As is the case with all the authors presented above, to a greater or lesser extent, no distinction is made between the pre-insurrectional production of revolutionary subjectivity and the post-1994 subjectivity, and important aspects and dimensions of the production of subjectivity internal to the indigenous communities, as well as in relation to the broader implications of the movement for radical subjectivities, remain in the dark.

Harvey and Halverson (2000) approach the indigenous communities but they too hesitate to give us an in-depth account of women's subjectivity. As was discussed earlier, Harvey and Halverson argue that the entire experience of women cannot be articulated within a collective identity, although collective identities are possible, and there will always be some elements that cannot be brought into a common language. This remainder is conceptualised with reference to Derrida's notion of the 'secret', as 'the portion of experience that escapes being categorised into universal narratives of identity, and, at the same time, cannot be purely limited to the individual' (p. 156). However, and despite the fact that their account is indeed insightful, these authors, having as their main aim to deconstruct certain theoretical binaries, remain on a rather superficial level of analysis, touching minimally upon identity and missing the opportunity to explore the 'secret' in relation to indigenous metaphysics and the transformation of the indigenous social imaginary. As I will explain in Chapter 6, any attempt to understand the Zapatistas as a whole, or certain aspects of them, and account for the production of subjectivity (and identity) in Chiapas should take into account the

indigenous world-view, the belief in the existence of *naguals* (animal co-essences), and how all this has influenced and has been influenced by the political activity taking place.

For their part, the autonomist Marxists, as expected, emphasise labour and self-valorisation in their attempt to give an account of what has happened in Chiapas. Living labour, as Hardt and Negri (1994) argue, poses the alternative schema of the self-valorisation of labour. And the subjectivities produced in the process are the agents that create an alternative sociality. The Zapatistas seen as a commune that has been autonomously organised as a permanent army, the long and intensive work of self-transformation of the indigenous communities, and the conscious social energy invested in the project of social transformation, demonstrate the importance of labour as the constructor of social alternatives (Lorenzano, 1998). Holloway's (1998a) notion of 'dignity' is also a significant contribution to understanding Zapatista subjectivity as constructed in relation to the category of dignity. However, all this is hardly an adequate account of subjectivity, and despite the fact that self-valorisation is indeed an endemic process of the production of subjectivity before and after the resurrection, and that the concept of dignity, as discussed by Holloway, does provide a novel attempt to shed light on Zapatista subjectivities, and radical subjectivities in general, there is much more than this; much more specific to the indigenous world, to the unique character of the Zapatistas and to the broader implications for subjectivity emanating from such a unique movement.

I would say here that the inability of the above theories and perspectives, including the non-academic radical perspectives, to deal effectively with subjectivity is, to a great extent, the result of their inability to account for the unique character of the Zapatista rebellion. In general, all these attempts appear hesitant and fragmentary and lack the theoretical horizon for producing a unified account of the relation between a revolutionary event and the subjectivities involved. The pre-1994 subjectivity is normally ignored and the emphasis is put on structural factors (i.e. harsh living conditions, restructuring of capital, etc.) as explanations of the rebellion. However, as the contributors to *Wildcat* (1996) have argued, poverty alone cannot explain revolts. People revolt because they decide to revolt, the contributors to *Wildcat* argue; and it is precisely an account of subjectivity in relation to revolt that is missing from all the readings of the movement, and

which I will explore further in Chapters 4 and 6, as well as in the concluding chapter of this book.

What happened to critique?

An obvious tendency among the academic readings of the Zapatistas is the complete lack of any critique of the discourse and practices of the movement. Here we should perhaps consider that with the so-called 'end of history' at its climax, and with radical politics in ebb on a global level, people involved in 'left-wing' politics had for a long time been longing for a revolutionary outbreak, and social and political alternatives. The Chiapas rebellion seemed to offer exactly what was missing from world politics; the re-inciting of the imaginary of the revolutionary transformative activity, a discourse and practice that brought together an analysis of global capitalism together with an emphasis on local autonomy, and idealised ideas about the indigenous world – and all this presented in Marcos' elegant prose, which produced an irresistible myth. People on the left thus invested hope and energy in the Zapatistas, and, given the precarious position of the movement, whose physical existence was continually under threat by the Mexican army and paramilitary groups, efforts were directed to help them survive within a hostile national and global context, and keep alive what the Zapatistas had to offer and inspired. Eventually, critique became a luxury, in many cases not even an issue to consider, and often was seen as potentially dangerous and reactionary. Thus, a number of elements in the Zapatistas that should have been extensively discussed and critiqued were left untouched and often were rather unsuccessfully justified. In this way, the road to idealisations and fallacies was wide open. Beyond this, however, and in relation to the points of critique I will make in Chapter 5, it seems that certain perspectives have nothing to say, and the Zapatistas are approached as a case study that confirms the validity of certain theories.

One of the aspects of the movement that have been untouched by critique within the academy is the Zapatista patriotic discourse. From the point of view of the Gramscian and Laclau and Mouffeian-inspired readings, the patriotic discourse of the EZLN is seen as a viable strategy to counter the Mexican government's hegemonic discourse. Thus, for Ortiz-Perez (2000), the Zapatista use of patriotic discourse shows the presence of 'constitutive antagonism', and the attempt to displace traditional meaning from hegemonic chains of signification, claiming back for the 'dispossessed' their share of

national identity. Similarly, for Gramscian readings, the references the Zapatistas often make to the Mexican nation, and the use of patriotic symbols and paraphernalia, are interpreted as an attempt to form an 'historic bloc' with a 'common will' with a national-popular character. In other words, Zapatista nationalism is an attempt to counter the hegemonic nationalist discourse of the Mexican government by proposing an alternative conception of nation, one that acknowledges the important role and position of the indigenous populations in Mexican history, and is, therefore, a more just and inclusive nation (e.g. Aragones, 1998). In certain cases, the defence of Zapatista nationalism as a strategy extends beyond the internal dimension of the attempt to incorporate the indigenous populations within a national project. Thus, while in the case of Ortiz-Perez (2000) the international context disappears, giving the impression that Mexico exists in a vacuum, for the Gramscian authors the distinction between 'national' and 'international' remains a valid one, and, therefore, it makes sense to defend one's nation from the attacks of international capital. However, as I will discuss in Chapter 5, a closer look reveals that the national-international distinction is increasingly disappearing and, therefore, we should move away from this social-democratic defence of the nation-state, and turn our attention and energies in a different direction.

We would expect a deeper analysis of the issue by authors on the autonomist (academic) Marxist track, if not for anything else, at least due to the fact that they have been shown to be attuned to the recent developments of global capitalism and its effects on the nation-state. Nevertheless, these authors in general avoid engaging in a critique of Zapatista nationalism. Autonomist Marxists either prefer to remain silent about the EZLN's patriotic hysteria or, as I will discuss in Chapter 5, have tried to justify the use of patriotic language and do away with accusations of the Zapatistas being nationalists, with an argument that resembles in many aspects that of the Gramscian and Laclau and Mouffean readings. It is, then, only in some of the non-academic radical left perspectives that we can find a critical approach to the EZLN's patriotic discourse. However, the critique in this camp is usually poorly elaborated, and we are often presented with rather problematic summary judgements. Consider, for example, Geoffrey's (1995) argument that the EZLN forgets that the nation, which they so passionately defend, is a bourgeois invention, and Deneuve et. al's (1996) claim that Mexican independence, and its ideals, to which the Zapatistas proclaim their attachment, was a

decisive moment for the impoverishment and proletarianisation of the indigenous people. These claims are not necessarily wrong, but the Zapatistas have been seen to be aware of all this, and their efforts have been directed towards developing a different conception of nation, indeed in the way that the academic readings suggest. A critique of Zapatista nationalism, then, should move further and focus on the developing global condition, and explore the defence of the nation-state as a political strategy within the new global order. Similarly, *Wildcat's* (1996) assertion that the Zapatistas are nationalists, and that their internationalism is an instrumental one, is an argument that, without being completely erroneous, misses the fact, as I will discuss in Chapter 5 in relation to De Angelis's (1998) argument, that the Zapatistas have set the basis for a new kind of internationalism. In short, amid the uncritical stance of the academic readings of the Zapatista nationalism, and the rather simplistic critique of some radical left perspectives, it is now time to move beyond these approaches and develop a more elaborated and theoretically grounded critique of Zapatista patriotism and national project, examining all its directions and dimensions.

Two other areas characterised by an uncritical approach are the relation between the Zapatistas and 'civil society' and the working class, and the stance the EZLN maintains towards the state. From a Gramscian and Laclau and Mouffean perspective, the Zapatistas have attempted, in the former case, to produce the political conditions that allow the exercise of sovereignty by civil society (e.g. Betancourt, 1998), and, in the latter, to establish a discursive complicity between the EZLN and civil society and take the conflict beyond the movement's territorial boundaries (e.g. Ortiz-Perez, 2000). The autonomist Marxist position is, in fact, similar, with the difference that for these authors civil society is composed of workers, and therefore the Zapatista attempt is to unite the Mexican working class (e.g. Lorenzano, 1998). Although these authors accurately grasp certain aspects of the Zapatista strategy, the problem arises when this strategy is taken at face value without any critical assessment. The uncritical stance of these authors is hard to understand, especially when we consider that the Zapatistas' use of the term 'civil society', as the contributors to *Wildcat* (1996) have rightly argued, tended to incorporate everybody, including neo-liberal and conservative proposals. Furthermore, by the time these authors were writing, the Zapatista Front for National Liberation (FZLN) had failed to develop into a strong, progressive civil organisation, limiting itself to the

support of university students (Monsivais, 1998), and the EZLN had failed, according to Marcos himself, to attract the Mexican working class (Le Bot, 1997). González's (2000, 2001) critique, that the Zapatistas have failed to build an alliance with other movements and armed groups in Mexico, then, needs to be taken seriously, and make us examine more closely the relationship between the Zapatistas and civil society, as well as other armed movements in Mexico. This is another issue I will examine critically in Chapter 5.

The stance the Zapatistas maintain towards the state is also poorly posed by academic authors. Again, as would be expected, for the Gramscian authors as well as for Ortiz-Perez's (2000) Laclau and Mouffean-inspired reading, the obvious reformist stance the EZLN has towards the state as a capitalist institution is seen in a positive light. The Zapatistas are seen as strategising the reform of the state so that the latter is attuned to the demands of civil society, including the indigenous populations. This is a new national project that requires the existence of the state in order to be implemented; a state that will operate according to the Zapatista principle of 'command obeying' through mechanisms of consultation; in other words, what already exists with a few modifications. Again, it is from the non-academic camp that the Zapatistas are criticised for their reformism and for not opposing the state and parliamentary democracy. However, in this case too, the critique carried out by these perspectives is summary and not theoretically grounded.

For their part, the autonomist Marxists, and despite the fact that they do have the theoretical tools for critically discussing the relation between the EZLN and the state, prefer to say nothing. It is indicative that although Holloway (2002) develops an analysis of the state as a capitalist institution – an analysis I will direct towards the Zapatistas in Chapter 5 – he avoids discussing the fact that the Zapatistas do not oppose the state, while he praises the movement for not wishing to take power. In some cases, the uncritical stance of the autonomist Marxists becomes reformism, and against any revolutionary aspiration. Thus, Lorenzano (1998) sees the revocability of the government and government officials, which the Zapatistas propose, as 'a profound radicalisation of democracy', and uncritically argues that the Zapatista project is 'not the negation or overcoming of bourgeois democracy ... but the opening of democratic participation to all' (p. 155), aiming at the maintenance of democratic rights already won, and the subordination of the state to the permanent control by the population. To put it simply, the absence of a critique leads

to the unconditional acceptance of the practices for the extension and deepening of the liberal democracy *à la* Laclau and Mouffe, and leads, often, to the unconditional abandonment of any idea of revolution.

Finally, another area characterised by a complete absence of a critical investigation is the internal workings of the indigenous communities, of Zapatista autonomy. There seems to be a general reluctance to delve into the Zapatista communities and come out with a critique of the processes and workings of autonomy. In general, the Gramscian readings tend to ignore the internal aspects of the movement, at best extolling the principle of 'command obeying' as the basis of indigenous democracy. In a similar way, the autonomist Marxists, both academic and non-academic, rightly see the Zapatista zone as a 'community in arms', a commune, emphasising the autonomous indigenous energies in constructing an alternative, but they hardly scrutinise or critically discuss any aspects of this alternative (e.g. Lorenzano, 1998; Aufheben, 2000).

Harvey and Halverson (2000), on the other hand, present us with a 'thinner' version of discourse (see Townshend, 2002b), and we approach closer to the material relations and conditions of the indigenous communities in Chiapas. However, we are still not close enough to be able to assess the authors' claims, and their approach remains basically uncritical and even problematic. For example, their argument that certain traditions have been important for women to overcome subordination (e.g. making traditional clothing, preparation of certain foods, etc.) overlooks the fact that it is these same traditions that have been, and still are, defining the house as women's sphere of activity, depriving them, for example, of the inheritance of land, which Harvey and Halverson (2000) see as one of women's challenges to tradition. These authors tend to gloss over a number of contradictions resulting in the idealisation of an aspect of Zapatista autonomy and struggle. The idealisation of women's struggle becomes even more apparent in the case of alcohol prohibition, for example, which is presented as one of women's greatest achievements. Alcohol, however, has been prohibited in the Zapatista territories since the early 1980s for reasons related to the need of the newly created Zapatista organisation for secrecy and confidentiality. By the beginning of the 1990s, when an alcohol ban became one of the women's demands, the majority of the Zapatista communities had already prohibited it, and alcohol consumption or non-consumption was a way of distinguishing Zapatistas from

non-Zapatistas. In other words, the relation of women to the ban on alcohol is a more complex one, and although I do not mean to deny the importance of it for women's lives, we need a deeper analysis of the relation between women and the EZLN.

A rather harsh critique of the internal processes and structures of Zapatista autonomy comes from some of the non-academic radical perspectives, with the EZLN as an army, indigenous democracy, the women's struggle, etc. all being fiercely attacked. However, the critique of these perspectives is characterised by a lack of first-hand information about the conditions of the Zapatista communities, together with a tendency to over-generalise and extrapolate from other historical examples. *Wildcat* (1996), for example, provides an analysis of the pro-capitalist character of many peasant struggles and their eventual recuperation in the interest of capitalist development, arguing that 'the current uprising in Chiapas is no exception' (p. 31). Although their analysis can be accurate, the contributors to *Wildcat* fail to give any account of how production is organised in the Zapatista communities and thus make their argument context-specific. Despite the fact that the Zapatista struggle might eventually be recuperated, a closer analysis could reveal important differences from other peasant struggles and perhaps reveal elements that somehow could resist such recuperation. Another example is Deneuve et al.'s (1996) argument about the 'nipping in the bud' of women's emancipation through their militarisation. Although there is some truth in this, these authors generalise from the experience of other armed struggles, and give us a rather reactionary account. Briefly I can say that the equal education boys and girls receive in the Zapatista schools, the training of both men and women as teachers and health promoters, women's increasing participation in decision-making, the defusing of gender relations and gender-related attitudes of the EZLN in the communities, and so on, make clear that the women's project in Chiapas neither starts nor finishes in the ranks of EZLN, and cannot simply be 'nipped in the bud'. Although it is not my purpose to discuss all these issues further, in Chapter 5 I will focus on the case of the secondary autonomous school in the *Aguascalientes* of Oventic, in order to break with the academic tendency to idealise Zapatista autonomy, contribute to a critical examination of the internal workings of the movement and give a context-specific critical account.

3

The Project of Autonomy, Constituent Power and Empire

The path of total police control over all human activities and the path of infinite creation of all human activities are one: it is the path of modern discoveries. We are necessarily on the same path as our enemies, most often preceding them, but we must be there, without confusion as enemies. The best will win.

Guy Debord, 1964

I borrow the concept of the *project of autonomy* from the philosophy of Cornelius Castoriadis and that of *constituent power* from the work of Antonio Negri (1999). I use the former to denote the emergence of a social-historical task and the latter to designate the materialisation of this task in and through democratic thought and politics. Drawing on Castoriadis's ideas and on Negri's political theory, my aim in this chapter is to develop a socio-historical framework for understanding the emergence of radical political movements and activities. The development of this framework will enable me to discuss the emergence of revolutionary subjectivities and their intersection with radical events (Chapter 4), carry out a critical reading of Zapatista theory and practice (Chapter 5) and explore the changes in the indigenous social imaginary as a result of the Zapatista insurrection (Chapter 6). It is not my purpose to proceed to a detailed analysis and critique of the work of the two authors or to integrate their theories into a complete whole. In fact, the latter would appear to be impossible given the different stances Castoriadis and Negri maintain in relation to Marxism. Rather, approach is eclectic. What I am interested in is identifying those elements in the work of the two authors that appear to be complementary and present us with a radical project of social and political liberation. Having done this my next step will be to describe the present order of things which I call, after Hardt and Negri (2001), Empire, as the historical context within which the Zapatista struggle is situated.

ONTOLOGICAL THESES

I start by presenting the main ontological theses in Castoriadis's work and elucidating some basic concepts that will enable us to grasp the idea of the project of autonomy and assist us in understanding the political processes presented later in this chapter.

'Being' as creation

'Being', Castoriadis (1986) argues, not only is 'in time' but also 'in essence' is time, and time is either nothing or creation, the self-deployment of a being-for-itself. When Castoriadis talks about creation he means genuine, ontological creation, the creation of new forms, of new *eide* in platonic terminology, and this, of course, implies destruction, the destruction of old forms. The emergence of new forms is creation *ex nihilo* and it is neither producible nor reducible from any other form, from what was already there. Society itself is a type of being-for-itself, a new ontological form, and it creates in each case its own world, the world of *social imaginary significations* (1994). The fact, however, that society is creation *ex nihilo* does not mean that such a creation takes place in a vacuum. The Greek democratic *polis*, Castoriadis (1991) explains, was created under certain conditions, with certain means, in a definite environment, with given human beings, a past embodied in the Greek mythology and language, and so on. All these, however, did not determine in any way the creation of the *polis* but only conditioned it. In short, unlike the rationalist, and therefore closed, Hegelian dialectic where the whole of experience is exhaustively reducible to rational determinations (Castoriadis, 1975), the idea of creation entails that the determinations over what there is are never closed in a manner preventing the emergence of other determinations.

The radical imaginary

The motive force of the process of creation is the *radical imaginary*. The radical imaginary can be broadly defined as the 'unmotivated positing of new forms' (quoted in Curtis, 1997, p. xxxiii), and exists as 'psyche/soma' and 'the socio-historical', with the latter having its own mode of being that is irreducible to physical, biological or psycho-corporeal existence. As 'psyche/soma' it manifests itself in the form of the 'capacity to posit that which is not, to see in something that which is not there' (quoted in Curtis, 1997, p. xxxiii), an open-ended creative and representational capacity or, in other words,

what he calls *radical imagination*, which exists indissolubly in both historical doing and the constitution of a world of significations; an historical doing and a world of significations that are not the product of any linear or dialectic process, but rather are the result of pure, genuine creation. Contrasted with the radical imagination of the individual psyche/soma is the *social imaginary* of the socio-historical (also referred to as the *radical social instituting imaginary* and *instituting society*, Castoriadis, 1975, p. 369), which exists in and through the positing-creating of social imaginary significations, and the making present of these significations, the *institution* (the institution can be defined in general terms as everything that constitutes society: norms, values, language, methods, the individual, etc.). The institution (also referred to as *instituted society*) is exactly this, the making present of the relative and transitory fixity and stability of the instituted forms-figures in and through which the radical imaginary alone can exist and make itself exist as socio-historical, and as such it should not be conceived as a lifeless product opposed to the activity that brought it into being (1975).

Social imaginary significations

Social imaginary significations, which are imaginary in the sense that they do not correspond to any 'rational' or 'real' elements, and social because they are instituted and shared by an anonymous collective (1981), constitute a magma of significations, or in other words a world, a web of meaning, which has an action-oriented and a language-oriented side. In fact, the magma is possible only through its instrumentation in language and action, or what Castoriadis (1975) calls the instrumental institution of *legein*, the identitary-ensemblist conditions of social representing/saying, and the instrumental institution of *teukein*, the identitary-ensemblist conditions for doing.¹ Society brings into being a world of significations and itself can exist only through reference to such a world. What holds society together is precisely the holding-together of its world of significations. Significations are not simply 'ideas' or 'representations', but the cement of (social) reality that holds together ideas, representations, acts, and so on. Nothing can exist for a society if it is not related to this world of significations. Everything that appears is immediately caught up in this web of meaning and can even come to appear only by being caught up in this world: 'society exists in positing the requirement of signification as universal and as total, and in positing its world of significations as what can satisfy this requirement' (1975, p. 359).

THE IMAGINARY OF AUTONOMY

If the *radical imaginary* includes the dimension that idealist philosophers called freedom, and is more appropriately termed indeterminacy (the latter is presupposed by autonomy), Castoriadis (1975) argues, it is because historical doing (through which the *radical imaginary* is manifested) 'posits and provides for itself something other than what simply is, and because in it dwell significations that are neither the reflection of what is perceived, nor the mere extension and sublimation of animal tendencies, nor the strictly rational development of what is given' (p. 146). It is here that the idea of the 'project of autonomy' can be introduced as an imaginary signification rooted in specific socio-historical conditions, as will be explained shortly. In fact, *autonomy*, as an expression of the radical imaginary, is to be found in radical imagination as well as in social imaginary in an indissoluble, non-causal relation. Any attempt to account for autonomy in terms of one of these two would take us back to the individual/society dichotomy, which Castoriadis discusses in order to reject all possible causal connections. (In fact, Castoriadis argues that the true opposition is not individual versus society, but psyche and society as mutual irreducible poles.) The project of autonomy, however, is not just another imaginary signification but one of the two main significations that characterise modern times, with the other being the *unlimited expansion of rational mastery*, the irrational character of which Castoriadis denounces in the forms of capitalism (1975), totalitarianism (1975) and techno-science, together with ecological destruction (1987).

Autonomy vs heteronomy

Castoriadis (1988a) contrasts autonomy with *heteronomy*, with the latter being that state of things in which a representation of an extra-social source of *nomos* ('law' in the broader sense of the term) is instituted, and where the *nomos* is given once and for all (gods, heroes, universal reason, laws of historical development, etc.) on which society or the individual has no action. Almost everywhere in the world, and almost always, societies have been living in a state of *instituted heteronomy* characterised by an instituted representation of an extra-social source of social reality, a representation created and perpetuated by religion and transcendental philosophies. The negation of the instituting dimension of society and the covering over of the *instituting imaginary* by the *instituted imaginary* goes hand

in hand with the creation of conformist individuals with a restrained radical imagination who live and think in repetition. Autonomy, however, is neither a biological, informational, organisational nor cognitive closure, as has been often suggested by natural scientists, for that would mean again a state of heteronomy where nothing new can penetrate the rigid interpretative system of the individual or society under closure (1981).

The project of autonomy, then, is not one of closure but of openness. It implies that a society calls into question its own institution, its representation of the world, its social imaginary significations, its *nomos*, etc., opening space, in this way, for a continuous putting-into-question of the instituted, a reflexive acting of a reason that frees the radical imaginary and produces a movement without end. It is the term *nomos* that gives full meaning to the project of autonomy, Castoriadis (1988b) argues, for 'to be autonomous, for an individual or collectivity, does not signify doing what one likes or what pleases one at the moment, but rather giving oneself one's own laws' (p. 332). This of course entails a new type of individual, a hyper-reflexive individual able to realise its fabricated, constituted existence and so self-constitute and reconstitute itself. In other words, a kind of subjectivity that is itself a social-historical project (2000). Again, however, the relation between individual and social autonomy is not a causal one in which the latter determines the former, or vice versa. Neither individual nor social autonomy is possible without the other since the existence of both is predicated on the existence of the other. An individual alone can never be free in a society, a fact that does not merely refer to the existence of a formal pressure (oppression) but to the unavoidable internalisation of the social institution without which there can be no individual. In order to invest in freedom, truth, equality, etc. it is necessary that these have already appeared as meanings or social imaginary significations. For individuals who aim at autonomy it is necessary that the socio-historical field has been altered in a way that opens space for an interrogation without limits. And such an alteration in turn is predicated upon the existence of individuals who have the psychic resources to challenge and question the instituted imaginary and put into continuous questioning the whole edifice of society.

The indissolubility of individual and society becomes apparent when Castoriadis, drawing on Lacanian theory, argues that individual autonomy is one's law opposed to the regulation by the unconscious, which is the law of another. The subject, Castoriadis (1975) argues,

is in a state of heteronomy in the sense that it is the discourse of the other, the intentions, desires, investments, significations, and so on, to which the individual has been raised and exposed, that dominate it. The project of autonomy, then, means that one replaces the discourse of the other with his own discourse. And one's own discourse is that which has negated the discourse of the other, not necessarily in its content, but inasmuch as it is the discourse of the other. The fact that one's autonomy depends on the elaboration of the discourse of the other indicates immediately the social dimension of the problem, the relation of one subject to another. No individual autonomy can overcome the oppressive structure of society and be possible without social autonomy. This is particularly true when, as he argues, the discourse of the other disappears in collective anonymity, in the impersonal nature of the 'economic mechanism of the market' and the 'rationality of the plan' of the law of a few presented as the law as such. So, the other becomes more than a discourse in the individual unconscious, it becomes an instituted social heteronomy, embodied in institutions like the police, the army, the courts, etc. And it is exactly the internalisation of these institutions that mutilates the radical imagination, prevents the installation of open modes of subjectivity and produces fabricated individuals instituted in unquestioned conformity of the predominant societal significations.

The emergence of autonomy

The emerging moment of the project of autonomy, Castoriadis (1986) argues, as a social imaginary signification, is to be found in ancient Greece and more specifically in the very birth of philosophy and democracy. Philosophy and democracy were born together and their solidarity comes from the fact that they both express a refusal of heteronomy, the rejection of the claims to validity and legitimacy of rules and representations just because they happen to be there. They both express a refusal of any extra-social source of truth, justice, etc. As was mentioned earlier, the project of autonomy presupposes that the collectivity questions itself and its own activity, instituting and re-instituting itself explicitly and reflectively. Democracy is exactly the regime of political self-reflectiveness, and the struggle for true democracy is the struggle for true self-government, the struggle for explicit self-institution. The same is true for philosophy. Philosophy is not about the question of being and its meaning (all these are secondary questions) but the emergence of a more radical question: 'What is it that I ought to think?' (about being, justice, truth, the *polis*,

one's own thinking, etc.). Any being-for-itself (individual or society) can only exist in a closure. Democracy is the project of breaking this closure at the collective level. Philosophy, creating a self-reflecting subjectivity (and materialising not a 'dialectical progression' but an historical self-deployment of thought), is the project of breaking this closure at the level of thought. It is important to mention here that it is not Castoriadis's intention to idealise the Greek democratic *polis* or Greek philosophy. On the contrary, he was aware of the predication of the Athenian democracy upon the existence of slavery and the exclusion of women, and of the fact that Greek philosophy reflected from the standpoint of determinacy, *peras*. What he really intended was to describe the context, the historical conditions that brought a social imaginary signification (of autonomy) into being. What emerges from all this, is that we have inherited a social imaginary signification that leads towards radical transformation, social and political relations and the full autonomisation of life, having as its primal locomotive forces radical democratic politics and an open-ended reflexive intellectual activity. It is within the project of autonomy, that revolutionary activity can be situated since it always expresses a radical questioning of the established order. In this sense, the Zapatistas are operating within the project of autonomy, and their demands for 'freedom', 'democracy' and 'justice' can be understood only within this movement towards autonomy.

FROM RADICAL IMAGINARY TO CONSTITUENT POWER

'Within the having to be', Castoriadis (1975) argues, 'the radical imaginary emerges as otherness, and as the perpetual orientation of otherness, which figures and figures itself, exists in figuring and in figuring itself, the creation of "images" which are what they are and as they are figurations or presentifications of significations or meanings' (p. 369). The fact that the radical imaginary can be manifested only through the individual radical imagination and the social imaginary immediately makes apparent its inseparability from the institution, the instituted society. In other words, the radical imaginary, the instituting imaginary can exist only in and through the institution as the extension, alteration, modification, interruption or destruction of existing social imaginary significations, meanings and forms, and in doing so it produces, creates new significations, meanings and forms (e.g. freedom, equality, justice, class struggle, socialism, etc.). It is the various expressions of the radical imaginary in and through

the imaginary signification of autonomy that has given continuity to autonomy, transforming it into a project. I call this the material radical expression of the radical imaginary, through the imaginary signification of autonomy, in the order of the political, *constituent power*, and borrowing from the work of Negri (1999), I now shift my analysis to this concept, tracing its trajectory in both political thought and practice.²

'Constituent power', Negri (1999) argues, in keeping with what I have already said about the radical imaginary, 'emerges from the vortex of the void, from the abyss of the absence of determinations, as a totally open need' (p. 14). It is 'a force that burst apart, breaks, interrupts, and unhinges any pre-existing equilibrium and any possible continuity' (p. 11), 'an activity equally all-powerful and expansive', a force tied to democracy as an absolute procedure and absolute government.³ In fact, constituent power is the radical expression of democratic will. It is through the praxis of constituent power that democratic will enters the political system destroying constituted power, or in at least significantly weakening it. Democracy, too, is an all-powerful and expansive force. Absence of determinations, void and desire are the motors of its dynamic. It is a dystopia 'in the sense of an overflowing constitutive activity, as intense as utopia but without its illusion, and fully material' (p. 14). Constituent power always has a singular relationship to time; it determines its own temporality and becomes an immanent dimension of history. At the same time it represents an 'extraordinary acceleration of time'. History becomes concentrated in the present and its possibilities condensed into a very strong nucleus of immediate production. This makes apparent the close link between constituent power and revolution.

Juridical theory and constitutionalism attempt to limit and control constituent power, stripping it of its destructive and creative powers and transforming it into a mechanism of the system. From the perspective of juridical theory constituent power is the source of juridical arrangements and relationships, the source of production of constitutional norms, and consequently of the norms that organise the powers of the state. Within the various forms of juridical theory, constituent power is affirmed only in order to be denied. It is affirmed in order to avoid the nullification of the democratic relation that must characterise the juridical system, but its violence and expansiveness must be tamed, incorporated into the established order, the constituted power. Eventually, constituent power is reduced to referendums and regulatory activities operating within well-defined limits and

procedures, and expressed only as a form of control of the state's constitutionality, as an activity of constitutional revision. Similarly, constitutionalism and liberal ideology pose themselves as the practice and theory of limited government, above all through the organisation of constituent power by the law. The constitutionalist paradigm always refers to the 'mixed constitution', to the mediation of inequality, and as such it is a non-democratic paradigm. Constituent power, however, as a violent and expansive force, is a concept connected to the social pre-constitution of the democratic totality, and this performative and imaginary dimension clashes with constitutionalism in a strong and lasting manner. This struggle between constituent power and the praxis of limited government, or in other words, between the creative forces of democracy and the inertia of constitutionalism, becomes more and more prominent as history advances.

The attempts to limit and finalise constituent power hold it back within hierarchies of the system and eventually reconstruct it as the result of the system rather than its cause. Sovereignty thus emerges as the foundation itself. Sovereignty, however, is a foundation contrary to constituent power, it is limited in time and space, in its rigidified formal constitution and its absoluteness is a totalitarian concept, whereas constituent power is the absoluteness of democratic government. I will return to the notion of sovereignty later in this chapter in the discussion of the second mode of modernity and the emergence of the nation-state as an attempt to block the constituent power, and bring to an end the project of autonomy. For the time being let me make two observations that will bring us to the next step of this chapter, that is a brief discussion of some genealogical moments of the project of autonomy and constituent power on the terrain of thought/theory, and on the terrain of political praxis. The first observation is that constituent power is strength (*potenza*) as opposed to power (*potere*). The metaphysical definition of strength that runs from Aristotle to Nietzsche, Negri argues (1999), is an alternative between absence and power, between desire and possession, between refusal and domination. When this alternative is closed, power is considered as a pre-existing physical fact, as finalised order or as dialectical result. When the alternative is open, however – and this is the case with a current of modern political thought from Machiavelli to Spinoza and Marx – the absence of pre-constituted and finalised principles is combined with the subjective strength of the multitude in the possibility of freedom. The second observation concerns the relation between constituent power and revolution. The

fact that constituent power opposes constituted power and cannot be reduced to it brings it in a continuous and circular relationship with revolution as resistance, rebellion, transformation, creation and construction of time, so that 'where there is constituent power there is also revolution' (p. 23). And this, together with the inseparability of constituent power from the concept of democracy, makes the former the motor of democratic revolution.

Having made these observations I will now proceed to identify moments in the history of thought and political practice that show the development of the concept of constituent power and the continuity of the project of autonomy. As Negri (1999) argues, these moments, events, 'have constructed new horizons of reason and have proposed new dimensions of historical being' (p. 35). At the same time, as we trace these genealogical moments of rapture within European modernity another project will unfold, a counter-project that sought, with transcendentalism as its main instrument, to control constituent power and block the project of autonomy. Before going on to the next step it is important to mention that the Zapatista rebellion has indeed been an expression of constituent power. However, the relation of the Zapatistas to constituent power is a more complex one, as I will discuss in the following chapters. Furthermore, I need to say that the reason I use predominantly European concepts to understand the events in Chiapas is because the Zapatista discourse is structured on the basis of concepts and ideas that have originated in Europe as the deployment of the project of autonomy, so that the events in Chiapas can be understood in terms of the expansion of the project of autonomy beyond the European borders.

GENEALOGICAL MOMENTS: THE RE-EMERGENCE OF AUTONOMY

After the Athenian democracy, the project of autonomy was interrupted by the Dark Ages and reappeared, after a fifteen-century eclipse, from the twelfth century onwards. In fact, it is the emergence of this project that marks the break with the Dark Ages. The period following the Dark Ages, what Castoriadis (1990a) calls 'the emergence and constitution of the West', is characterised by the self-constitution of the proto-bourgeoisie, the building and growth of new cities, the demand for some kind of political autonomy and renewed intellectual, mental, artistic and psychical attitudes. Tradition and authority gradually cease to be sacred, and innovation stops being the disparaging word that it had been during the previous centuries.

Hardt and Negri (2000) argue that what characterised the break was the posing of being as an immanent terrain of knowledge:

Between 1200 and 1600, across distances that only merchants and armies could travel and only the invention of the printing press would later bring together, something extraordinary happened. Humans declared themselves masters of their own lives, producers of cities and history, and inventors of heavens. They inherited a dualistic consciousness, a hierarchical vision of society, and a metaphysical idea of science; but they handed down to the future generations an experimental idea of science, a constituent conception of history and cities and they posed being as an immanent terrain of knowledge and action. (pp. 70–1)

In other words, what marked the break was the discovery, or better, rediscovery, of what Hardt and Negri (2000) call, the *plane of immanence*, as the primary event of modernity. It is precisely what these authors call the plane of immanence that I identify here as the project of autonomy.⁴ In this first period of the rediscovery of the plane of immanence the powers of creation, previously consigned exclusively to the heavens, are brought down to earth, and humanity reappropriates what the medieval transcendence had taken away from it. From the fifteenth century numerous figures, from Bovillus to Galileo, demonstrated that the human intellect was appropriating once again its creative capacities and powers. The plane of immanence was developing into a new paradigm of life, and bodies and minds were gradually transformed. Just as in philosophy and science, in politics too a new understanding of power, and a new conception of liberation, were set in motion. Human knowledge was coming to be a doing, a practice that transforms nature, and democracy was reappearing as the power of the masses.

With Machiavelli and the turn of the sixteenth century, we encounter a profound rupture that takes place inside the entire theoretical-political tradition of Western thought. Machiavelli, Negri (1999) argues, was the first to understand and develop constituent power as strength and as virtue. Virtue is the force that destroys traditions and power, and creates new orders. The new prince is himself the author of logic and language, of ethics and the law, and as such is value, a productive strength, a creation *ex nihilo*. Machiavelli understood that any actualisation of constituent power is always opposed by the irrationality of the constituted. This is, in fact, the problem of the new prince, that whenever virtue is realised

it discovers that it is working to accumulate something that, as soon it becomes strong, it opposes to it. Virtue versus fortune – this is the elementary opposition in Machiavelli's work that carries enormous revolutionary potential. Virtue becomes constituent power when the capability to act on time, to constitute it as much as overdetermine it, is armed. And it is exactly through its relationship with arms that virtue forms the social orders. As Machiavelli proceeds in his work, the absoluteness of the political invented in *The Prince*, in the *Discourses of the First Decade of Titus Livius*, becomes republic, democracy, and as the language of the former is absorbed into that of democracy of the latter, a new conception of democracy appears, so that there is democracy only where there is constituent power. Democracy, therefore, must also be armed, but its first and fundamental arm is its people. The multitude thus re-emerges as the subject of constituent power and democracy, becomes the open 'regime' where the absence of determinations allows virtue to unfold fully. In Machiavelli, the historical constitutive ontology reveals itself as historical materialism. Being is constituted by human praxis, and action and dissent are the basis of the order of things. This historical materialism, however, never becomes dialectic materialism. There is a moment of neither synthesis nor subsumption: '[R]upture is more real than synthesis. Constituent power never materialises except in instances, vortex, insurrection, prince ... but it is precisely this rapture that is constitutive' (p. 89).

The re-emergence of the project of autonomy caused reactions, incited strong antagonism and eventually brought about war. Conflict arose between the constituent power of the masses and the constituted power. The immediate reaction was a *counter-project of heteronomy* which aimed to control, dominate and expropriate the force and dynamics of the new movement, and divert its direction towards a transcendent plane:

Although it was not possible to go back to the way things were, it was nonetheless possible to re-establish ideologies of command and authority, and thus deploy a new transcendent power by playing on the anxiety and fear of the masses, their desire to reduce the uncertainty of life and increase security. The revolution had to be stopped. (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 75)

These two projects were, in fact, the two modes of modernity, the two paradigms that sought to dominate it. The Renaissance thus ended in war – religious, social and civil (in France, England,

Germany). Civil war was absorbed into the concept of modernity, and modernity itself is defined by crisis, a crisis born of the uninterrupted conflict between the immanent creative forces and the transcendent power aimed at restoring order.

In philosophy with Descartes we are at the beginning of the Enlightenment's attempt to dominate the idea of immanence. Descartes established reason as the exclusive terrain of mediation between God and the world, reaffirmed dualism (experience vs thought), and his pre-constituted transcendental rules inscribed in consciousness and thought would limit *a priori* the potentialities opened up by the humanist principle of subjectivity. Unfolding in the centuries of Enlightenment, the counter-project's primary task was to construct a transcendental apparatus capable of disciplining the masses, through a functional dualism and adequate mechanisms of mediation that had to be defined as an ineluctable condition of human action. Experience was thus relativised, and any instance of the immediate and absolute in human life and history abolished.

In politics, too, the counter-project needed a transcendental apparatus in order to control the challenge of the masses' attempt to organise spontaneously and express creativity autonomously. The aim was to maintain a kind of transcendence that would effectively control and dominate the modes of production and associations of the new humanity. Thomas Hobbes's proposition of an ultimate and absolute sovereign ruler, a 'god on earth', demonstrates exactly the counter-project's attempt to transfer every autonomous power of the multitude to the all-encompassing control of a sovereign power. The theory of sovereignty, developed under the logic that it would guarantee survival against the mortal dangers of war, which Hobbes saw as the originary state of human society, was defined by both transcendence and representation, two concepts that the humanist tradition posed as contradictory (Hardt and Negri, 2000).

In contrast to Hobbes's transcendentalism and metaphysical atomism, his contemporary, James Harrington, would probe Machiavelli's ideas further, deploying a dynamic materialist method and defining constituent power as the material counter-power of the multitude. Whereas in some countries, as was the case of France, Machiavelli's work, stripped of its democratic implications, was funnelled into the absolutist power of the modern state, in other countries, where the conditions allowed it, its revolutionary strength as such was maintained and it became a source of political renewal. In revolutionary England Machiavelli entered as the author who

introduced the critique of constituted power, the analysis of social classes, and the concept and the practice of the popular militia as constituent power. It is in this context, and in the work of Harrington, that the concept of constituent power and the project of autonomy showed their continuity in the seventeenth century. In line with Machiavelli, Harrington moved towards radical positions of the revolution that, supported by the freeholders-in-arms, anticipated the desire for a socialist redistribution of land. The constituent power in his thought is born precisely out of the class struggle, seeking to bring any form of fortune back to the balance of virtues, and manifests itself as counter-power and then as formative power. It is a constituent paradigm constructed within modernity, but also against the affirmation of capitalism. It might be true that Harrington did not adequately assess the importance of the emerging capitalism, and underestimated money, usury, bank mediation, etc. This, however, is not as important as the fact that he founded a theory of constituent power and class struggle (and of the state) that constituted an unsurpassable grid in modern thought before Marx. Even when the revolutionary project was over (the monarchy was restored in 1660) and the traditional constitution was reaffirmed, the constituent principle continued to renew itself, determining insubordination and civic unrest and seeking new spaces. Eventually, the notion of constituent power and the Harringtonian legacy would go beyond their temporal defeat to implant themselves in the spaces of colonial America (Negri, 1999).

In the struggle for hegemony over modernity's paradigm, victory went to the forces that sought to neutralise the revolutionary movement with a transcendental apparatus. In the seventeenth century Europe became feudal again, and the Counter-Reformation Catholic Church as well as Protestant Churches all contributed to the establishment of order. The counter-project attacked Europe's 'outside', by attempting to subordinate America's native population. Conquest gave way to colonisation, and Eurocentrism was born as a reaction to the potentiality of a newfound human equality. In the second half of the century, monarchic absolutism seemed to block the forces of liberation and sought to fix the concept of modernity stripping, it of its crisis. The counter-project drove the imaginary of autonomy into silence, but never actually managed to eradicate it. The project continued to live underground, always there as an enemy threatening at any instant the established order of constituted power. In the same seventeenth century of transcendence,

feudalism, absolutism, Counter-Reformation, war and colonisation, Baruch Spinoza's philosophy, with its strength–desire–love triad, would demonstrate the continuity of the project of autonomy by constituting the productive matrix of the revolutionary thought of humanism. With few exceptions, however, almost all philosophical currents – empiricism, idealism and successive philosophies – would be drawn into the project of transcendentalism, and every conceptual formation would come to be marked by the formalisation of politics, the pacification of social antagonism and the instrumentalisation of science and technique for profit (Hardt and Negri, 2000).

In the eighteenth century, Kantian philosophy would not escape the project of transcendentalism. Kant manages to place the subject at the centre of the metaphysical horizon, but at the same time he controls it by means of three operations: the emptying of experience in phenomena; the reduction of knowledge to intellectual mediation; and the neutralisation of ethical action in the schematism of reason: 'This is the leitmotif of Kantian philosophy: the necessity of the transcendental, the impossibility of every form of immediacy, the exorcism of every vital figure in the apprehension and action of being' (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 81). Hegel later managed to restore the horizon of immanence, but this horizon was blind, where the potentiality of the multitude and its immanent goals were denied and subsumed in the allegory of the divine order, and transformed into the necessary transcendent power of the state: 'The state in and for itself', Hegel argued, 'is the ethical whole ... it is essential to God's march through the world that the state exists' (quoted in Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 83). There is no longer anything that strives, desires or loves; the content of potentiality is blocked, controlled, hegemonised by finality. With Hegel modernity was complete.

Two events in the second half of the eighteenth century, however, would demonstrate that the project of autonomy was still alive. The American and French Revolutions each expressed the radicality of the refusal of the constituted and the choice, the determination to open a horizon, to create a world that did not yet exist. It is beyond our scope to discuss the liberal and bourgeois character of the American Revolution and French Revolution respectively. From the point of view of the project of autonomy, what concerns us here is that in both it was revolutionary activity that constituted the motor of the reworking of social and political arrangements; all relations are put into discussion, everything shaken from its depth. In the American Revolution the mobs or the associations have the same function as

the Machiavellian and Harringtonian *comitia*, the same function that would later characterise the French clubs, as well as the masses and the councils of the soviets in the Russian Revolution. What is fundamental in all these cases is the rupture with the existing power, with the instituted order and the expansion of a revolutionary project. Whereas in the case of the American Revolution the ideology of freedom becomes the constituent principle of the dynamic constitution of space, where democracy and imperialism confront each other, in the case of the French Revolution constituent power is recognised as the movement of the popular classes against the bourgeoisie and the struggle against labour.

Even when both revolutions are defeated, when a transcendent sovereignty and representation are restored, when the time of constituent power is brought to an end by the age of the bourgeoisie, the masses have managed not only to reconfigure the political space and impose a process of mediation but, most importantly, to pose a revolutionary imaginary of rupture that extended beyond the temporality of the given events. The American and French Revolutions, and later the Russian Revolution – but also a series of insurrections and rebellions – testify to the continuation of the deployment of the project of autonomy through the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a complex, complementary and progressive historical project towards emancipation:

In proposing constituent power as virtue of the multitude, Machiavelli prepares the terrain for Harrington and for his constitutional conception of armed counterpowers. And whereas the American Revolution, by introducing an undefined constitutional dialectic of the singular and concrete rights of freedom, spreads the process of political emancipation, the French Revolution works this space in terms of equality and from the standpoint of the liberation of labour – thus posing the foundations of the Bolshevik effort to constitute the political arrangements of living labour. (Negri, 1999, p. 304)

The second mode of modernity managed to guarantee control over the new figures of social production and to direct the profit from the new forces. Hobbes's proposition of an ultimate and absolute sovereign ruler and the attempt to transfer every autonomous power of the multitude under the all-encompassing control of a transcendent sovereign power came to correspond to the condition posed by Kantian schematism and Hegelian dialectics. Functional for the development of the monarchic absolutism of the seventeenth

century, the Hobbesian proposition surpassed its own historical period, and its transcendental schema came to be the only schema of power. It is not coincidental that Rousseau's 'republican absolute', whereby the construction of a general will proceeds towards the sovereignty of the state, was not really different from the Hobbesian monarchic absolute. When, in the second half of the eighteenth century, modern sovereignty met capitalism, it was due to this alliance that the former managed to achieve hegemonic, world-scale control. The relationship between capitalism and modern sovereignty becomes apparent in the work of Adam Smith in which the political transcendence of the modern state is defined as an economic transcendence. And it is in Hegel that Hobbesian absolutist and Rousseauian republican aspects of modern sovereignty and Smith's theory of value are brought together (Hardt and Negri, 2000).

'When the synthesis of sovereignty and capitalism is fully accomplished', Hardt and Negri (2000) argue, 'when the transcendence of power is completely transformed into a transcendental exercise of authority, when sovereignty and capital become one, then sovereignty becomes a political machine that rules across the entire society' (p. 87). And it is through the workings of the sovereign machine that the multitude is transformed into an ordered totality. Sovereignty, apart from being a political power against all external political powers, is also a police power that runs in opposition to constituent power. Where the latter introduces openness and creative activity, the former brings closure and control. Modernity replaced the traditional transcendence of command with the transcendence of the ordering function. Throughout this passage administration exerted a continuous and extensive effort to produce and order social labour by making the state always more intimate to social reality. These processes and the establishment of a sovereign power attempted to close the crisis of modernity on the one hand, but they opened it on the other, for they were as critical and conflictual as the genesis of modernity itself (Hardt and Negri, 2000).

As capitalism and sovereignty advanced together in the nineteenth century, the political and social scene changed completely with the trajectory of capitalist development being nothing but a continual process of the subsumption of society and labour under capital. Capitalism had become constituted power, a sort of violence that overdetermined social relationships. It was in the work of Marx that the conditions formed by capitalist development found their critique and refusal. Marx, Negri (1999) argues, translated constituent power

as 'political movement', that constituent force of a radical democracy in which the critique of power is combined with the emancipation of labour. With Marx the project of autonomy becomes a critique of the bourgeois theory of labour as consolidated, accumulated, dead labour, and the bourgeois theory of power as an overdetermination of living labour by dead labour. Living labour, instead, embodies constituent power, and it is in the cooperative immediacy and creative spontaneity of the former that the latter finds its own capacity for innovation and creative massification. With Marx the project of autonomy became the struggle of the proletariat against capital, and it was on this theoretical basis that the Russian Revolution would erupt at the beginning of the twentieth century. Later, in Chapter 4, I will explain how the Zapatista insurrection comes from the historical line of the October Revolution mediated by the Cuban revolution. For the time being I will briefly discuss the emergence of the nation-state in order to form the basis for a critique of Zapatista nationalism in Chapter 5.

The nation-state

The development of the sovereign state led to the development of another concept: the nation-state. The concept of nation in Europe developed on the terrain of the patrimonial and absolutist state, which survived throughout the seventeenth century, with the support of a specific compromise of political forces, only to be transformed in the successive centuries by replacing its theological foundation of territorial patrimony (the divine body of the king) with the spiritual identity of nation, itself a transcendent concept. The notion of the nation-state, structured by both capitalist productive processes and absolutist administration, emphasised biological continuity, spatial continuity of territory, linguistic commonality and, most important, citizenship, which together function as an ideological shortcut that attempted to liberate modernity and sovereignty from the antagonism and crisis that define them, and closed alternative paths that had refused to cede their powers to state authority. Nation thus came to be the coming together of the Rousseauian 'general will' and what capitalism conceived as the 'community of needs', and would be posed as the only active vehicle, even by revolutionary movements, that could deliver modernity and development. The emergence of the 'nation' renewed sovereignty and gave it a new definition, while at the same time it masked its crisis by ideologically displacing it and deferring its power.

Ever since its appearance, 'nation' has often been presented as revolutionary, as indeed it was during the French Revolution, and linked to, in fact justified by, the notion of the people. As the concept of nation completed that of sovereignty by claiming to precede it, so too the notion of people completed that of nation through a similar logic. In fact, the notion of the people did not precede that of the nation but, on the contrary, was a product of the latter. Here, each step back functions to solidify the power of sovereignty by mystifying its basis, that is, presenting the concept as natural. The identity of people and nation must appear natural, originary. The notion of the people, as opposed to that of the multitude, was a product of the nation-state and survives within this ideological context. The notion of the people is a homogeneous category, implies a common will, a fixed identity, excludes those outside, and corresponds exactly to the ordering of individual desires and energies into a totality, a constituted synthesis. The 'people' is thus the vehicle of obedience and conformity.

EMPIRE: THE WORLD ORDER

The decline in sovereignty of nation-states does not mean that sovereignty as such has declined, but rather that it has taken on a new form, composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule. This new developing global form of sovereignty is what Hardt and Negri (2000) call Empire. Empire is something altogether different from imperialism and colonialism, when these are defined in terms of the extension of the sovereignty of the centralised power of the European nation-states beyond their own boundaries. Empire emerges in the twilight of the sovereignty of the national states. Understanding the present order as the development of (from its conception world economy) capitalism, or as the perfecting of the imperialist project of dominant states, fails to see the important rupture or shift that characterise the imperial horizon. Hardt and Negri (2000) argue that as a result of the project of economic and social reform under US hegemony, and according to the model constructed by the New Deal, the imperialist politics of the dominant countries were transformed in the post-Second World War period. Three mechanisms or apparatuses organised the new global scene and characterised the imperial power of the New Deal, all of which constituted a step in the constitution of Empire

and demonstrated how far it had moved from the old practices of imperialism:

(1) the process of decolonisation that gradually recomposed the world market along hierarchical lines branching out from the United States; (2) the gradual decentralisation of production; and (3) the construction of a framework of international relations that spread across the globe the disciplinary productive regime and disciplinary society in its successive evolutions. (p. 245)

In fact, *Empire* tells the story of the end of the colonial and imperialist form of domination. In contrast to imperialism and colonialism,

Empire establishes no territorial centre of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is decentred and deterritorialising apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. (p. xii)

Imperial sovereignty itself is realised in the periphery, where borders are flexible and identities are hybrid and fluid. Centre and periphery, however, are equally important, shifting positions continuously, and fleeing any determinate locations. Within this order of things no nation-state can form the centre of an imperialist project. The United States occupies a privileged position within the new order, but this results not from its similarity to the old imperialist powers but from its differences owing, at least in part, to the expansive character of its constitution. Furthermore, the tendential realisation of a world market now makes it impossible for any country or region to isolate or delink itself from the global system in order to develop as the dominant capitalist countries of the past:

Even the dominant countries are now dependent on the global system; the interactions of the world market have resulted in a generalised disarticulation of all economies. Increasingly any attempt at isolation or separation will mean only a more brutal kind of domination by the global system, a reduction to powerlessness and poverty. (p. 284)

It is the shift marked by the passage to *Empire* that enables capitalism today to bring together economic power and political power, to realise, in other words, a properly capitalist order and replace the competing imperialist powers by the idea of a single

power that overdetermines them all and place them under a notion of right that is postcolonial and post-imperialist. This new notion of right, or rather, this new inscription of authority and new design of the production of norms and legal instruments of coercion, is characterised by an ethico-political dynamic that brings together two notions that, beginning in the Renaissance, were separated throughout modernity: on the one hand, a conception of 'international right'; and on the other, the utopia of 'perpetual peace'. These two notions are now reunited so that right can again be understood in terms of the concept of Empire. And the renewed interest in the effectiveness of the concept of *bellum justum* ('just war') is exactly a symptom of this new notion of right. In the postmodern world, war is reduced to the status of police action and the new power that can legitimately exercise ethical functions through war is sacralised. Two distinct elements, Hardt and Negri (2000) argue, are combined in this concept of just war, whose synthesis may be a key factor determining the foundation and the new tradition of Empire: 'first, the legitimacy of the military apparatus insofar as it is ethically grounded, and second, the effectiveness of military action to achieve the desired order and peace' (p. 13). In Empire is born, in the name of exceptionality of the intervention, a form of right that is the 'right of the police':

The formation of the new right is inscribed in the deployment of prevention, repression, and rhetorical force aimed at the construction of social equilibrium: all this is proper to the activity of the police. We can thus recognise the initial and implicit source of imperial right in terms of police action and the capacity of the police to create and maintain order. (p. 17)

The imperial process of constitution tends to penetrate, directly or indirectly, and reconfigure the domestic law of the nation-state, and thus supranational law overdetermines domestic law. The most significant sign of this transformation is the development of the so-called 'right to intervene' from the dominant subject of the world for preventing or resolving humanitarian problems and imposing peace. This right is qualitatively different from the old kind of intervention which aimed to impose or ensure the application of voluntarily engaged international accords. Now, supranational subjects intervene by consensus in a permanent state of emergency and exception, and police action is legitimated by universal values. The enemy that Empire opposes today might present more of an ideological threat than a military challenge. In fact, Empire's power of

intervention might be better understood as beginning with the moral intervention performed by a variety of bodies, including the news media, religious organisations and, most important, so-called non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These groups identify universal needs and human rights and conduct 'just wars', thereby prefiguring and preparing the imperial intervention.

Imperial sovereignty is distinct from the sovereignty of the national states in that it encompasses all space and all time. In all the critiques of modernity, from Machiavelli to Spinoza, from Marx to Foucault, Hardt and Negri (2000) argue, there is a foundational *inside* that searches for an *outside* often projected as utopia. In Empire this outside no longer exists; there is nothing original to or independent of the artifice of the civil society, nothing outside the world market. Similarly the private/public distinction dissolves, since the public increasingly becomes privatised, and the private becomes public. Racism too takes on a new form. Unlike the old racism where biological differences were used to construct and exclude the 'Other', imperial racism, or differential racism, includes and integrates others within the imperial field and then differentiates them in a system of control functioning as a kind of market meritocracy of culture. Within this context all the distinctions between inside/outside and private/public collapse and subjectivity too is not restricted to a specific place/institution. Its production takes place everywhere in a way that one is always in school, in prison, in the family, and so forth. In fact, all these processes characteristic of imperial sovereignty can be grasped in terms of a total subsumption of the world to capital. Capitalist domination is now omnipresent, transforming the entire globe into a world market and incorporating everything within its order.

In Empire every movement is fixed, and everything is integrated in a systemic totality. All conflicts and crises, rather than disintegrating the imperial machine, push forward the process of integration, calling, at the same time, for more central authority. Empire 'is both system and hierarchy, centralised construction of norms and far reaching production of legitimacy spread out over world space' (p. 13). Empire, in short, is characterised fundamentally by a lack of boundaries, its rule has no limits, and not a transitory moment in the movement of history, but an order that effectively suspends history, 'the regime with no temporal boundaries, in a sense outside history or at the end of history' (p. xv). Hardt and Negri (2000) identify three distinct moments of the imperial apparatus of command, one inclusive, one differential and the third managerial. In other words, Empire first

integrates everybody in its realm, then affirms their differences in cultural terms, and in the third moment organises these differences in a general economy of command.

The present imperial order should be seen neither as the outcome of the interaction of radically heterogeneous global forces coordinated by the world market, nor as the product of a single power and a single centre of rationality that guides the various phases of historical development. The constitutional processes that have come to define the central juridical categories, and in particular the processes of the transition from the sovereign right of nation-states (and the international right that followed from it), to the first postmodern figures of imperial rights, can be seen as a genealogy of juridical forms that led to the supranational role of the United Nations and its various affiliated institutions. The formation of the United Nations functioned as a hinge in the genealogy from international to global juridical structures, and pushed forward the transition towards a properly global system. Empire, however, marks a paradigm shift, and cannot be understood as formed on the basis of any contractual or treaty-based mechanism, even if understood as the most advanced development of the United Nation, or through any federative source. The source of imperial normativity is born of a new economic-industrial-communicative machine; in short, a globalised, bio-political machine.

The great multi- and transnational corporations, as well as finance and trade agencies (e.g. the IMF, the World Bank, the GATT, and so forth), are all important in constructing, in many aspects, the fundamental connective fabric of the imperial bio-political world together with the subjectivities that animate it. By the end of the 1970s transnational corporations had begun to establish their activities firmly across the globe. That was a decisive constituent phase of Empire, since the mediation and equalisation of the rates of profits, through the activities of these corporations, were decoupled from the power of the dominant nation-states, and the constitution of the capitalist interests tended to be formed under the control of these corporations. Transnational corporations no longer, as in the past, impose an abstract command and organise an unequal exchange. Now they directly distribute labour power over various markets, allocate resources and organise the various sectors of the world production, gradually transforming nation-states into mere instruments to record the flow of commodities, monies and populations they set in motion:

The great industrial and finance powers thus produce not only commodities but also subjectivities. They produce agentic subjectivities within the biopolitical context: they produce needs, social relations, bodies, and minds—which is to say, they produce producers. In the biopolitical sphere, life is made to work for production and production is made to work for life. (p. 32)

The development of the communications networks too has a cause-and-effect relationship to the emergence of the new world order. Communication industries and the production of language, communication and the symbolic not only express the process of globalisation but also directly organise it by multiplying and structuring interconnections through networks. The legitimisation of the imperial machine is born, at least in part, of the communication industries, that is, of the transformation of the new mode of production into a machine. It is a subject that produces its own image of authority. This is a form of legitimisation that rests on nothing outside itself and is re-proposed ceaselessly by developing its own language of self-validation. Communicative production and the construction of imperial legitimisation march hand in hand and can no longer be separated.

Although at a first glance the new imperial constitutional framework appears chaotic, a closer analysis reveals a tripartite power pyramid that delimits coherent horizons in the global juridical and political life. This imperial pyramid resembles Polybius's theoretical analysis of the Roman Empire as bringing together the three 'good' forms of power: monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. The present-day Empire is thus constituted by the functional equilibrium of these three forms of power, bringing together the monarchic unity of the US and its global monopoly of force; aristocratic articulations through transnational corporations and nation-states; and democratic mediation and representation embodied in the nation-states, the various kinds of NGOs, media organisations and other organisms. Imperial control too operates through three global and absolute means: the bomb – an exercise of absolute violence; money – monetary mechanisms of market control; and ether – the management of communications, regulation of culture and so forth. These three global means of control in turn refer to the three layers of the imperial command in the sense that the bomb is monarchic, money aristocratic, and ether democratic. It is thus within this developing order that we need to situate the Zapatistas and examine their discourse and praxis. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 5, Hardt and Negri (2000) argue that

the Zapatistas are one of the many struggles around the world that express their local concerns, and rejection of the particular forms of exclusion and oppression they are subjected to. Although this is true, the Zapatistas have gone beyond their immediate local demands in addressing the Mexican nation (in relation to the international order) as well as addressing 'humanity' (in relation to neo-liberalism), and the effects of the uprising have been of tremendous revolutionary significance in inspiring and inciting other struggles.

NOTES

1. *Legein* and *teukein* are possible through what Castoriadis calls 'identitary logic' which separates things into elements, which in turn must be capable of forming wholes. This is the logic of science, of mathematics in particular. It holds that for things to exist they have somehow to be congruent, to be 'defined', 'distinct', and it derives its privileged status from its extreme applicability in the natural stratum. Although identitary logic is not suitable for understanding the 'imaginary', the institution of society would be virtually impossible without it. And this is so because it is through this logic that language and doing exist, for they both presuppose that different elements (e.g. words) are brought together in order to form a superior whole (e.g. sentence).
2. It can be argued that constituent power, as a productive force, an expression of radical imaginary, is not bound to the project of autonomy. It exists wherever the 'old' is thrown into question, altered or destroyed, and new forms of life are produced, created. It is constituent power, in this sense, that accounts for the advent of fascism in Nazi Germany. That would be, however, only an abuse of constituent power. For the 'constituent power' of the Nazis is a closed one, a constituent power that is temporarily affirmed only in order to be denied. Unlike other social imaginary significations which tend to affirm constituent power in a closed and deterministic way, and transform it into order, constituted power and often terror, the project of autonomy affirms and frees constituent power as an all-producing force, as a power that produces being that must be maintained open and active. Further, in both capitalism and fascism, constituent power is subtracted from any possibility of a spatial or temporal alternative to the grip and destiny of modernity. Rationalisation of space and time becomes the norm and constituent power is controlled, tamed. Its space and time become the space and time of death. In other words, it is only through the social imaginary signification of autonomy that constituent power as the material expression of radical imaginary can be fully affirmed in all its dimensions as a life-producing force. It is in this sense that when I talk about constituent power I talk about the project of autonomy, and vice versa.
3. Absoluteness does not imply totalitarianism here. The latter is not a necessary corollary of the former. What is meant by 'absolute' is that the democratic constitutive process 'is absolutely free from determinations

not internal to the process of liberation, to the vital assemblage' (1999, p. 27).

4. I use the terms 'project of autonomy' and 'plane of immanence' almost interchangeably here, mainly because I believe that at this point they refer to the same processes. However, I think that the 'project of autonomy' is a more adequate term for two reasons. First, it implies a historical continuity and some kind of progress that are now politically significant. Second, because, although the project encompasses the 'immanent', the latter does not necessarily entail democratic politics. It could be argued in relation to this, for example, that modern genetic techno-science has discovered the fulness of immanence, a fact, however, that can by no means characterise it as democratic.

4

Zapatista Revolt and Revolutionary Subjectivities

Our position is that of combatants between two worlds – One that we don't acknowledge, the other that does not yet exist.

Raoul Vaneigem, *Situationist International*, 1961

Utilising the framework developed in the previous chapter, and employing a number of other theoretical resources, the purpose of this chapter is to move towards a new theorisation of the Zapatistas with an emphasis on the uniqueness of the rebellion as a political occurrence, its importance for inciting the revolutionary imaginary and its implications for revolutionary subjectivities. To do this I will mainly employ the theory of Alain Badiou, as well as autonomist Marxist, Situationist and Laclau and Mouffeian concepts, producing a new theoretical framework for approaching the rebellion. I will argue that the rebellion should be understood as an *evental situation*; a condition between Badiou's concept of the *event* and the Situationist concept of the *constructed situation*. The next step will be to discuss the emergence of revolutionary subjectivities in relation to the Zapatista 'evental situation', distinguishing between three kinds of 'subjects of fidelity'. Finally, I will consider two problems in Badiou's theory, and will discuss these problems in relation to the Zapatistas, evoking, at the same time, Castoriadis's idea of the 'project of autonomy' as a way to get round these problems.

FIDELITY TO AN EVENT

In a book first published in French in 1998 and then in English in 2001, titled *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Alain Badiou attacked the dominant ethical ideology for lacking any emancipatory political project, any genuinely collective vision of social and political transformation. This ethical ideology can be seen as having two philosophical axes – on the one hand, a Kantian universalising axis grounded in the abstract universality of general human attributes and rights, and on the other, a vaguely Levinasian axis based on

recognition of the Other and expressed mainly in a respect for cultural differences. In either case, Badiou argues, there is a tacit reference to theology, a static and inert representation of life, and both paradigms conceive of man as *mortal*, fragile and passive, accompanying, in this way, right from the first moment in its constitution, an apathetic contemporary subjectivity. Badiou is concerned with an ethic derived from 'our positive capacity for Good, and thus from our boundary-breaking treatment of possibilities and our refusal of conservatism' (2002, p. 16). This is an ethic of processes by which we treat the possibilities of a situation that opens up thought and affirms truths against the desire for nothingness, an ethic that has its roots in the rupture of the constituted order of things, and the opening up of possibilities instigated by an 'event'.

The idea of the event is central to Badiou's understanding of ethical action. Not every innovation is an event, an event is a flashing supplement that happens to a situation, something extra that cannot be reduced to and explained by 'what there is', something beyond-the-law of a situation that cannot be dealt with and be accounted for by the usual way of thinking and behaving, with reference to the instituted language and knowledge. There are four domains of action and thought that Badiou sees as event-producing, and they constitute, at the same time, the four fields of processes of truth: love, science, art and politics.

It is an event in one of these fields that brings someone, a particular human animal, to the composition of a subject. The subject, which does not necessarily coincide with the individual since it can be a collective subject too, is in no way existent in a situation before the event. There is no subject before one is compelled by the evental rupture to enter a process of inventing a new way of being and acting in a situation. The subject, in other words, emerges as a process through one's fidelity to an event, through one's rethinking and reorganisation of his/her life in accordance with the evental supplementation of a situation. And it is precisely from one's fidelity to an event, from the decision to relate to a given situation from the perspective of the new dimensions added to it as a result of the evental rupture that a 'truth' emerges.

A truth is, Badiou argues, 'the real process of a fidelity to an event: that which this fidelity produces in the situation' (2002, p. 42). Truth is an immanent break within a situation, immanent precisely because it is the material course traced by the evental supplementation and a break because what enables the truth process, namely the event, takes

a radical distance from the prevailing constituted knowledge. It can thus be said that the subject is the bearer of fidelity, the one who bears a process of truth and who, by bearing and being faithful to this truth, exceeds and increases his/her being. It is with respect to subjects of this kind that it is possible to speak of an *ethic of truth* as the principle that enables the continuation of a truth-process, and which is no less than the consistency of one's singularity in the continuation of a subject of truth, of the submission of the 'perseverance of what is known to a duration peculiar to the not-known' (2002, p. 47). The maxim of an ethic of truth is thus 'do not give up', be faithful to the truth process in which you are caught, seize in your being what has seized and broken you.

Beyond its innovative elements and importance for its militant ethic, Badiou's theory presents us, as I will discuss in the final section of this chapter, with several problems. One that is relevant here is that the main category of his theory, the event, is largely undefined and we are given no criteria to distinguish what kind of happening should be considered as an event (see Schulz, 2004). Badiou does not provide us with any detailed description, in positive terms, of what an event would be like for the four truth processes, or any conceptual tools for recognising events. Rather, reading his work we come to develop intuitive criteria for distinguishing events, assisted by images of break and rupture and historical examples of artistic, amorous, scientific and political events. We might be grasping Badiou's own understanding of the event in the order of the political, when he holds up as examples the 'politico-military audacity of a revolutionary stratagem' (1992, p. 54), 'the revolutions and provocations of inventive politics' (1992, p. 38), often with references to the French and Chinese Revolutions. We are, nevertheless, left with a constant question as to whether or not this or that occurrence could be qualified as an event.

Although a detailed discussion of what constitutes an event goes beyond the purpose of the current book, I will attempt to contribute in this direction and flesh out the event, by linking the concept, in the order of the political, to a notion I have discussed in Chapter 3: constituent power as discussed in the work of Antonio Negri (1999). The reason I will link the event to constituent power is in order to sustain the event as a revolutionary political occurrence and avoid its theoretical reduction and trivialisation. And sustaining the event as a real revolutionary rupture is important because the subject that the event brings to life though fidelity brings on its configuration, the character of the event. In other words, revolutionary events bring

revolutionary subjects to life. I should make clear that my intention here is not to equate the event with constituent power and present the two as being one and the same thing. Badiou's conception of the event is indeed different from Negri's constituent power (Hallward, personal communication), and Badiou (2002) himself has briefly expressed disagreement with Negri's perspective. However, constituent power can be approached as an important dimension of an event and an indispensable element of its production. There can be no event without constituent power, despite the fact, as I will explain later, that where there is constituent power there is not necessarily an event.

THE EVENT AND CONSTITUENT POWER

'Constituent power', Negri argues, 'is that force that, in the absence of finalities, is projected out as an all-powerful and always more expansive tendency' (1999, p. 14). Emerging from the vortex of the void, from the abyss of the absence of determinations, as a totally open need, it is a force that bursts apart, breaks, interrupts, unhinges any pre-existing equilibrium and any possible continuity. Constituent power is an activity that not only produces constitutional norms and structures of the constituted power but, most importantly, constitutes the very motive force of democratic politics. Its relation to the law always remains alien; it refuses being constitutionalised and fully integrated in hierarchical systems of norms. It resists being incorporated into the 'constituted power' and being expressed within well-defined limits and procedures, of being represented in referendums, constitutional revisions, regulatory activities, and so forth. The time of constituent power is characterised by a formidable capacity of acceleration. History becomes concentrated in the present and its possibilities condensed into a very strong nucleus of immediate production; this is, Negri argues, the time of the event and the generalisation of singularity. Constituent power, as an all-encompassing force, is thus in a circular relation with revolution so that where there is constituent power there is also revolution.

What Negri describes as acceleration of time, as history concentrated in the present, as the force that unhinges any equilibrium, interrupts any continuity and destroys constituted power, are, in fact, important dimensions of the event, in the order of the political, as something that produces a hole in a given situation, that cannot be explained according to pre-existing language and knowledge. Seen in this way it can be argued that constituent power is a necessary condition of

an event so that there is an event only where there is constituent power; and since where there is constituent power there is also revolution, then it follows that where there is an event there is also a revolution. In short, the event is always a revolution. The history of constituent power considered in its development, Negri argues, reveals two continuities. One is demonstrated in a linear manner in the expansion and continuity of the revolutionary principle of the *ex novo* constitution of political arrangements, and can be traced in the history of the great revolutions, the history of events. Within this first trajectory a second historical continuity is revealed, a subjective process, or better, a process of subjective action of living labour and the concretisation of a collective will. This latter continuity is close to what Badiou describes as fidelity to an event and the consequent process of truth. I will come back to this second aspect of Badiou's work later in this chapter. For the time being let me explore briefly how the event can be theoretically trivialised, stripped of its revolutionary hypostasis and reduced to any radical political occurrence.

NOT JUST ANY EVENT

In an article on the reactivation of democratic revolution, Stavrakakis (2003) engages in a polemic against the idea of revolution as the 'revolutionary radical re-foundation of the social' (p. 8) through an acrobatic argument that is important to discuss since it leads to a conception of the event that could be derived from Badiou's work and that reduces the revolutionary character of the event. Stavrakakis manages to build his argument by means of two important misrepresentations, one that links the revolution to a sterile utopianism taken as a model for all utopian thought, and a second that selectively excludes the revolutionary elements from the notion of democratic revolution. Undoubtedly Stavrakakis is right in his critique of (certain kinds of) revolutionary utopianism as a project of radical transformation of society that implies the elimination of the incursions of the negative. What we cannot agree with, however, is the subsumption of the notion of revolutionary radical change to this particular kind of utopianism. If revolution has been for long time accompanied by certain doses of a closed and deterministic utopianism, this is by no means sufficient to negate its importance and weaken our desire for it. It is true that the notion of democratic revolution coined by Lefort and others, to which Stavrakakis refers as an alternative to utopianism, is, to a great extent, free of Engels-

Leninist utopian elements and has incorporated negativity as the essential dimension of the political constitution of the social. It is equally true though – and Stavrakakis seems to ignore this – that at least some of those who worked within the milieu of democratic revolution never abandoned the idea of a revolutionary radical project, and repeatedly made clear that the elimination of negativity and the subsequent totalitarianism – in Russia in this case – was not a result of the revolution itself, but an outcome of the relationship between the Leninist party and the state (e.g. Castoriadis, 1975). To put it simply, the elimination of negativity and totalitarianism were and are not necessary corollaries of the revolutionary project, and, it could be added here, not necessary corollaries of utopia either, when the latter is seen not as a blueprint or a static depiction of governance but rather as a process and activity, as a prefiguration of the future (see McManus, 2002).

As mentioned earlier, the reason I discuss Stavrakakis's position is because he arrives at the point of incorporating the event within the Laclau and Mouffeian 'radical democratic' agenda that seeks, he argues, to deepen the notion of democratic revolution. I believe that this conception of radical democracy does not deepen the notion of democratic revolution, but simply recuperates it by stripping away its revolutionary vision. This is not, however, primarily what concerns us here. Rather, what is important is that the event, after revolution has been equated with a closed utopianism, is stripped of its revolutionary hypostasis and loses its radical significance. Its eventality is transposed to any radical political occurrence (e.g. strikes, demonstrations, occupations, etc.) seeking some kind of change, and it is further incorporated within the project of the extension and deepening of liberal democracy *à la* Laclau and Mouffe (1985). The event according to Stavrakakis's radical democratic position, then, is 'a real break which destabilises a given discursive articulation, a pre-existing order' (p. 13). A real break, in other words, is reduced to the destabilisation of a discursive articulation as opposed to a real revolutionary rupture. An immediate result of this is that we lose sight of the real revolutionary event, in its past, present and future dimensions, which is the basis of a positive ethic, in the midst of various radical political occurrences and their destabilising effects. We can agree, however, with Stavrakakis's position that it is not enough to encourage fidelity to an event, an openness towards event-ness has to be cultivated, despite the fact that he does not give us any

hints as to how this can be achieved, and theoretically trivialises the notion of the event.

I will argue that the way to cultivate openness towards event-ness, which is openness towards revolution, is through the construction of *situations*, which should never be taken for events. Distinguishing between the event and *constructed situations* my aim is to take a step further and construct a typology that will allow us to clarify further the idea of the event, and deepen our understanding of the Zapatista rebellion. Later in this chapter I will use another term, *evental situation*, corresponding to a different kind of radical political occurrence, and discuss it in relation to the Zapatistas. However, as that category stands somehow between an event and a constructed situation, I find it useful for reasons of clarity to explain the latter term first. I call 'constructed situations' all the radical political actions that, deriving their imaginary (in positive terms as it is discussed in Castoriadis's work), from given events (or 'evental situations'), have the capacity to destabilise the capitalist order of things and dominant discursive articulations, modify, and expand the imaginary of the past events, and anticipate, prefigure a future event by producing the conditions of its becoming.

CONSTRUCTED SITUATIONS

The term 'constructed situations' belongs to the French Situationists (1957–72) and was defined in the first issue of the journal *Situationist International* in 1958 as 'a moment in life concretely and deliberately constructed by co-organisation of a unitary environment and an interplay of events' (quoted in Hussey, 2001, p. 126). Constructing a situation, then, implies a collective construction of a moment, a collective involvement in, and modification of, all the aspects of a moment in time, from the scenery to how those involved are acting. A constructed situation is somehow beyond art and politics. While bourgeois art is predicated upon the division between the artwork and the spectator, a constructed situation demands the total involvement of the individual in its construction so that the division between the spectacle and the spectator dissolves. At the same time, the process of constructing a situation implies and entails the collective creation of one's own conditions of life. In this way, the construction of a situation, Edwards (1996) argues, 'could be interpreted both as the supersession of the arts and as a revolutionary supersession of politics' (p. 1). This latter possibility is how the Situationists came to

understand their project in the late 1960s, so that the occupations of factories during the political upheaval of 1968 in France were seen as a step on the way to the construction of situations on a larger scale, namely, that of society as a whole.

'We must develop', Debord (1957) argued, 'an intervention directed by the complicated factors of two great components in perpetual interaction: the material setting of life and the behaviours that it incites and that overturn it' (p. 44). Constructed situations are thus the interplay between behaviour as praxis and the material setting of life, creatively lived moments in specific settings, instances of a critically transformed everyday life. They are to produce experimental models of behaviour, transformation of the city, as well as to cause agitation and a polemic against the sterility and oppression of the actual environment and the ruling political and economic order. These temporary moments of passionate, realised intensity, these situations without a future which can confuse and wrongfoot the enemy, are revolutionary because they have the potential not only to disrupt, but also to transform the mediocre nature of everyday life, challenge dominant values and behaviours, cross literal and metaphorical boundaries and produce new subjectivities. Constructed situations, as moments of pure subjectivity and immediacy, have the potential to subvert the hypnotising power of the 'spectacle', the domination, in other words, of the image and the impossibility, under capitalist conditions, to experience 'real life' and actively participate in the construction of the lived world (see Debord, 1967).

I will come back to the concept of constructed situation in order to explore its relation to the event and its relation to revolutionary subjectivities. Here I will move on to consider another condition in my typology of political transformative activity, the 'evental situation'. I will not enter into a detailed theoretical analysis of the evental situation. Instead I will briefly outline what an evental situation is and will discuss the Zapatistas as an example.

ZAPATISTAS: AN EVENTAL SITUATION

What is an evental situation?

As I explained earlier, where there is an event there is also constituent power and, therefore, a revolution. However, and despite the fact that linking the event to constituent power is important for fleshing it out and maintaining its revolutionary character, it is definitely not a

sufficient condition for describing an event, and we have to recognise that the reverse is not always true. In other words, it is not always the case that where there is a revolution there is also an event, and certain revolutions would be better described as 'evental situations' rather than events. I will explain the term before I proceed to discuss it in relation to the Zapatistas.

'If the French Revolution stands as the great political event of modern times', Hallward argues, 'the Haitian revolution must figure as the single most decisive sequence of this event' (2004, p. 3). My argument is that the Haitian revolution as a 'decisive sequence' of the event was not a mere insurrection inspired by the French Revolution but an evental situation. An evental situation goes further than simply adopting the practices and discourses of an event. An evental situation reworks the elements of an event so that they become relevant to a different context and production regime. By doing so an evental situation marks the beginning of a new circle of struggle, and re-incites the revolutionary imaginary, expanding it in time and space. Thus, in colonial Haiti, *liberté*, *égalité* and *fraternité* were reworked and transformed into a struggle against slavery and war for independence, setting the basis for subsequent African and Latin American liberation movements (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Hallward, 2004). In other words, although it is the event of the French Revolution that opens the terrain for all these liberation movements, it is the evental situation of the Haitian revolution that strikes the spark for subsequent movements. The evental situation is thus something like an intermediate factor that translates the event to the language specific to certain conditions and contexts. However, I should mention here that an evental situation is not always a necessary intermediate factor between an event and political struggles.

Another example comes from the line of struggle initiated by the October Revolution, the historical line of communism and proletarian revolt. Within the Latin American context and beyond, the first evental situation emanating from the event of 1917 was the Cuban revolution. The Cuban revolution adapts and transforms Leninist and Bolshevik logic and practices to the specific conditions of a country under a dictatorial regime and agriculture-based economy. The Cuban revolution reinvented, in a sense, the event of the Bolshevik Revolution challenging important elements that brought about or resulted from the October event (e.g. the centralised model of the 'popular army' and the submission of the guerrilla forces to the control of a political party). The subsequent guerrilla organisations and

national liberation fronts that spread throughout Latin America after the Cuban revolution followed the Cuban model in many respects, maintaining the autonomy of the guerrilla forces from political control of the parties but, at the same time, replacing it by the control of a military authority. All these groups and fronts can be seen as large-scale, constructed situations emanating from the Cuban evental situation, for despite the success of many of these movements in becoming significant forces of democratisation for a number of Latin American countries, and despite the differences existing among these groups, their imaginary, logics, discourses and practices remained within the limits defined by the Cuban revolution. The effects of an evental situation always expand in time and space, and thus the Cuban revolution re-incited the revolutionary imaginary, transposing it beyond its geographical specificity, outside Latin America. To put it another way, an evental situation is somewhere between an event and a constructed situation. It functions as a bridge between an event and a series of struggles, or as a force that re-incites the evental imaginary, and even reinvents the original event. Again, I do not mean to imply that such an intermediate factor is always necessary since political struggles can emanate directly from an event. However, an evental situation is the condition that reactivates and reinvents the event (or a previous evental situation), especially when the latter has lost its power to foment struggle and produce revolutionary subjectivities.

The Zapatista revolt

The Zapatista revolt was not an event. The insurrection of 1994 did not produce any 'hole in the situation', but rather a strong shaking in the configuration of the situation. Since then the movement has been enclosed within a reformist political programme with an emphasis on indigenous rights and constitutional changes that is far from a conception of an evental rupture, and closer to conceptions of struggle for the extension of liberal democracy. Constituent power was only minimally unleashed in Chiapas, and it was quickly controlled and contained by the Mexican army, and by the rebels themselves (see Chapter 5), failing to contribute towards the production of an event. The insurrection of 1994 did not deliver a viable blow to capitalism, perhaps only delaying its development on a local level, which continues its trajectory without any real revolutionary deterrent or alternative. In fact, we are forced to recognise the precarious position of the movement in relation to the world system, and their subsequent absorption, through a series of reformist manoeuvres,

within the capitalist economy. Thus, even from this commonsensical point of view, we cannot see the Zapatistas as an event since from the beginning the rebellion seemed to lack the power to bring about a real rupture with capitalism.

Approaching the Zapatistas from a discursive point of view – with the discursive rupture as another dimension of an event – seeing them, in other words, as an event of discursive destabilisation *à la* Stavrakakis, makes things even clearer. Undoubtedly, the rebellion managed temporarily to destabilise the dominant hegemonic discourse of capitalism, but it has failed to articulate a discourse that could become hegemonic or counter-hegemonic on a national or international level. The effect of the Zapatista political discourse has been that of shaking, partly unfixing, in Laclau and Mouffean terms, the signifiers of democracy, freedom and justice, and so forth, but without being able to make them completely float within the field of discursivity, or being able to fix their meaning again as part of a revolutionary project. For this reason we cannot talk of the Zapatistas as a discursive event either. The movement's discourse destabilises meanings but does not bring about a real discursive rupture. It unfixes signifiers, but only partly, and is unable to build an eventual (multi-) unity on the basis of a new discourse.

Although the Zapatista insurrection does not constitute an event from the point of view of constituent power and discursive rupture, it cannot be seen as a constructed situation either; any attempt to reduce the Zapatistas to a mere continuation of the Cuban revolution, and see them as an experience similar to that of other Latin American countries after the Cuban revolution (or to any kind of contemporary identity oriented struggle), would overlook the unique nature of the insurrection and its importance as a hinge linking the past and the present. Undoubtedly, the Zapatistas have many characteristics that resemble the guerrilla movements of the past; everything from the Leninist (and Maoist) background of the first militants of the EZLN, the initial *focos de guerrilla* tactics and the later liberation army organisation with military titles and ranks, the armed occupation of townships, the seizure of ammunition from military camps and police stations, land occupations, expulsion of landowners, radical transformation of power relationships in the indigenous communities, autonomous education programmes in opposition to the mainstream national education system – even the extremely militarised response of the Mexican federal army – and a plethora of processes and changes compose, on a local level, the scenery of an insurrectionary moment

similar to that of Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, and so on. And definitely one could see in the Zapatistas many characteristics of contemporary movements, and approach the Chiapas rebellion as an incident in the struggle for indigenous identity. All this is, however, only a part of the Zapatista insurrection, and tells us only half the story about the 1994 revolt.

The Zapatistas revolt, and the movement in general, maintain characteristics of the National Liberation Fronts (and identity-related struggles) to the extent that they function as a hinge between the old guerrilla model and the new model of bio-political network structures (see Hardt and Negri, 2004). Unlike the Latin American guerrilla model, the Zapatistas have attempted, and have largely succeeded in bringing about, an inversion of the traditional hierarchical structure of centralised military hierarchies that characterise the former. Leadership positions are rotated, decisions are always taken collectively in the indigenous communities according to the principle of 'command obeying', and Marcos as the dominant figure of the movement has the rank of subcomandante to emphasise his relative subordination. Furthermore, the EZLN, breaking completely from the National Liberation conception of politics, emphasises the need to create horizontal networks of communication, and have rejected not only the seizure of state power as a means of implementing socialism from top down which dominated previous experiences (see Holloway, 2002), but also any involvement in mainstream parliamentary politics. There is already something that goes beyond a constructed situation in all of this; there is a peculiar mix of continuities and repetitions, together with discontinuities and even ruptures that give the Zapatistas a quasi-evental status. Traditional guerrilla elements coexist with the 'postmodern' use of network technology and discourse; two distinct models of struggle coming together through a theatrico-poetic articulation that makes the Zapatistas a 'bridge' between the past and the present, and prefigures the struggles to come. What the Gramscian and Laclau and Mouffean readings of the rebellion, as well as non-academic radical readings I have discussed in Chapter 2, fail to see is precisely this quasi-eventality of the Zapatistas that makes it impossible to explain the rebellion within existing, ready-made theoretical frameworks. The Zapatistas force us to reconsider our categories, to invent new terms and new frameworks for understanding the revolt and move towards the future. This is an element of their quasi-evental character too.

In an attempt to flesh out what an event can be I discussed discursive rupture (or at least a discursive supplementation) as a dimension of an event too. Earlier, I explained that the Zapatista discourse cannot be approached as an evental discourse; there is no rupture, no radically new element, no discursive supplementation in the EZLN's discourse. On the other hand, the Zapatista political discourse, an amalgam of what can be called an urban constructed postmodern discourse and an indigenous pre-modern shamanistic discourse – with liberal, social-democratic, socialist and anarcho-utopian elements – has managed to incite the revolutionary imaginary and 'interpellate', to use Althusserian terminology, people and groups involved in radical politics (but not only so) from all around the world. There is an ambiguity, lack of definition and unorthodox synthesis of heterogeneous elements that make the Zapatista discourse function in a quasi-evental fashion, expanding in space and time, penetrating diverse contexts, re-inciting the radical social imaginary.

Unlike Hardt and Negri's (2000) view of the Zapatistas as communicating local demands, it is precisely the expansion of the Zapatistas' political discourse on a universal level, beyond its local specificities, that has managed to incite the revolutionary imaginary and bring about political activity outside its territorial borders. The Marxist guerrillas of Colombia (or the Maoist rebels of Nepal) use a rather traditional revolutionary language that has nothing of an evental character. On the other hand, the Bolivian *campesinos* and the Brazilian landless movement (Movimento sin Terra) employ a language that emphasises local political and economic demands, and as such it is not easily communicable to other struggles and has little universal application. Undoubtedly, local demands exist in Zapatista discourse too, issues of racism, land, poverty, and so on are there to be communicated, but this is only one dimension, and the Zapatista discourse unfolds itself in another direction that puts emphasis on concepts and ideas that have universal appeal and do not depend on local conditions, or better, apply to all conditions of oppression and exploitation (e.g. 'democracy', 'dignity', 'a world where many worlds fit', 'humanity against neo-liberalism', etc.). The same is true for the local indigenous shamanistic discourse that I will discuss in Chapter 6. This discourse is never explicit in the Zapatistas' comunicués, but it is not absent either. What is present is its poetics, its prophetic nuance, but it is free of its local specificity and details, and as such does not dominate Zapatista discourse but contributes to its novelty and universal character.

The discourse of an evental situation, unlike that of a constructed situation that only communicates local concerns, although in conjunction with the global order, has a universal axis; a universal element that goes beyond any specificity and re-incites the revolutionary imaginary. None of the most radical political occurrences of the last two decades, from the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 to the strikes of South Korea in 1996 and the Genoa demonstration in 2002 – all seen as constructed situations – has managed to produce the effect of the Zapatista insurrection in inspiring activists, entering academic debates and becoming, somehow, the imaginary linking thread of the so-called anti-globalisation movement. In this sense, therefore, we have to recognise that the Zapatista politico-poetic discourse, always in combination with their praxis, has some of the effects of a discursive event in inciting and shaking the productive and creative mechanisms of the revolutionary imaginary. As McManus (2002) argues, the Zapatistas are a fictive and creative force which works by means of alterity, critique, prefiguration and transformation. And their importance for what I call here ‘revolutionary imaginary’ or ‘radical social imaginary’ is that they (re)activate what McManus calls a ‘creative epistemology of the possible’ (p. 9), meaning that the future is there to be made creatively and, of course, it is to be made collectively. To put it in other words, the importance of the Zapatistas and their quasi-eventality does not lie in their revolutionary theory or their political alternatives to capitalism, but rather, in making obvious the need for and, most importantly, the possibility of revolutionary politics. The end of history is suspended after 1994, the omnipotence of capitalism is challenged, the Zapatistas demonstrate that to revolt is still possible, that victory is possible too, that new ways of struggle have to be invented and that we do not need to give in to capitalism or reformist ideas of change (despite the fact that they themselves engage in that). From this point of view the effects of the movement expand in time and space in an evental fashion, keeping alive and taking forward the revolutionary project.

Rather than being an event *à la* Badiou, or a large-scale constructed situation of a National Liberation or guerrilla army style of other Latin America countries, the EZLN managed to create an ‘evental situation’ at the end of the twentieth century by moving beyond the practices and discourses of the past and setting the basis of a new model of revolutionary politics; a model based on democratic horizontal structures, on network organisation, and which puts emphasis on direct operations as well as information warfare. In the same way

that the Cuban evental situation inspired and fomented a number of guerrilla armies and National Liberation movements from Argentina to Mexico, the Zapatista evental situation constitutes today a strong link in the anti-capitalist struggle, and the most important source of inspiration for the circle of constructed situations initiated in Seattle in 1999. As I will discuss in the following chapter, the Zapatista insurrection was catalytic for the emergence and reactivation of various groups and movements that now constitute the so-called anti-capitalist movement (ACM). And the ACM, reflecting to a certain extent the Zapatistas, is a mixture of old and new modes of struggle – old and new in terms of logics, political theories, tactics, strategies, and so on.

I conclude here that no ready-made theoretical approach, with an emphasis on hegemonic practices, identity politics, self-valorisation or otherwise, can grasp the totality of the Zapatista insurrection. We have to move on and invent new concepts and frameworks for understanding not only the Zapatistas but also the new cycle of anti-capitalist struggle worldwide; new concepts that not only explain what is happening, but push forward towards a revolutionary future. Neither the concept of the event nor that of constructed situation offers an adequate theoretical tool for understanding the Zapatistas. The Chiapas revolt stands somewhere between the two, resembling in some of its aspects a constructed situation, and in others an event. This is what I have tried to grasp here, coining the term 'evental situation', a term that expresses the uniqueness of the rebellion and its capacity to re-incite the revolutionary imaginary in a period when the event of the October Revolution had disappeared into the distance, and the Cuban evental situation had lost its power mainly due to its anti-democratic organisation. This quasi-eventuality of the Zapatista rebellion provides the condition for the production of fidelities and, therefore, the emergence of new subjectivities. The Zapatista revolution (with a small 'r') implies, as Holloway (2002) argues, different degrees of participation and commitment. This is what I now move on to discuss in terms of Badiou's description of fidelity to the event.

THE THREE SUBJECTS OF FIDELITY

The Zapatista evental situation is a condition that interpellates us and places us in the process of subject becoming, especially when we consider its importance for the revolutionary imaginary and what I

described in Chapter 3 as the project of autonomy. Although Badiou discusses fidelity as an undifferentiated process in terms of its relation to a given event, I find it more appropriate here to approach fidelity and the production of subjectivities it entails in a more concrete way. More specifically, the kind, character and style of fidelity to an event depends on the degree of participation in that event, one's distance or proximity to it, as well as one's position(s) in the capitalist hierarchy and relations of power. To put it simply, there is more than one fidelity to a given event, each with its particular demands (and perhaps with different relations to 'evil'), and distinct productions of 'truth'. I will discuss further this rather obvious empirical fact with reference to the Zapatistas, and will distinguish between three broad subjects of fidelity and their relationship to the Zapatista evental situation. It is these subjects of fidelity that are called to take the Zapatista revolt further into the future and produced the conditions for the realisation of a new evental situation or perhaps an event.

The subject of resistance

The first subject of fidelity is the Zapatistas themselves, the indigenous and non-indigenous *campesinos* who on 1 January 1994 occupied several municipalities and townships in Chiapas, declaring war on the Mexican government, accusing it of years of oppression and exploitation of the indigenous populations, and attacking the crime of neo-liberal reality. I have to mention briefly here that the irruption of the Zapatista evental situation was not an accidental or spontaneous incident, but the outcome of the coming together of a multitude of (pre-)fidelities which, for at least for ten years, were producing 'truth' in the mountains and jungle of Chiapas. I will come back to this issue later to explore the interconnection between events and the need to direct our fidelities to an event towards a future realisation, in other words, towards a future event, a future revolution.

The position of those directly involved in the construction of the evental situation in Chiapas, and in the construction of revolution in general, is unique and their fidelity completely different from that of somebody who is far away from the geographical site of the events. It is my argument that for those directly involved in the evental situation, for the immediate participants of the Zapatista insurrection, fidelity is primarily materialised as *resistance*. This by no means implies that this is the only dimension of fidelity, and the Zapatistas have shown that they are also capable of constructing situations within their evental situation, the *Marcha Zapatista* in

2001 being the most recent example. I believe, however, that every broad category of subjects of fidelity has a dominant mode through which fidelity is materialised. Resistance for those directly involved in an event implies that the condition initiated by the event is kept alive, that the subjectivities will continue to be produced in terms of resistance, that even if the end of this particular struggle is inevitable, this will not happen easily. Resistance for the Zapatistas means that they do not give in to the Mexican government's offer of financial help and incorporation into the capitalist system, to the federal army's attacks and propaganda, and the atrocities of the paramilitary groups, that they resist the capitalist attack of the Plan Puebla-Panama in Chiapas, that they refuse their incorporation into the electoral system, that they keep on thinking of ways to improve and expand their structures and democratic processes. Resistance is the way by which the Zapatistas remain faithful to their eventual situation and through the truth that this fidelity constructs – what they call *la palabra verdadera* ('the true word') – they become subjects, revolutionary subjects in resistance. It is important to mention here that the eventual situation itself produces conditions that transform the autonomous space into a zone of resistance and the subjectivities into subjectivities of resistance. Space and subjectivity cannot be separated here, and the Zapatistas have managed to survive the attacks of the Mexican government and resist its low-intensity war due to the inseparability they have produced between space and subjectivity.

'A truth process', Badiou argues, 'is untouched by crisis. Initiated by an event, in principle it extends to infinity' (p. 78). What is not untouched by crisis, however, are the 'someones' who enter into the process of 'subject-becoming' initiated by this process. Crisis as the disjunction between one's fidelity and individualist demands of interest throw the subject into confusion and into a confrontation with a pure choice, a choice between the 'keep going' ethic of resistance and what Badiou calls the logic of the perseverance in being of the mere mortal that one is. Crisis exposes the subject in process to the temptation of betrayal of his fidelity, of the truth process, of his becoming a subject. Resistance – and in our case Zapatista resistance – thus means that the multitude of subject-becoming in Chiapas continues its production of truth. 'Do not surrender! Resist! Do not betray the honour of the true word ... Do not sell yourselves! Resist!' (EZLN, 1994b, p. 238). This is the imperative of the ethic of resistance that immediately leads us to notions of sacrifice as devotion to a cause (Knabb, 1977), and the need for an ethic of death that

negates all heteronomous promises of immortality (Castoriadis, 1997). Resistance is an ethical stance that gives the immanent break of truth production a continuity that expands beyond the subject-becoming process and the production of truth of those directly involved in the evental situation, and touches the very core of the revolutionary imaginary, and those caught by it. I will not enter into a discussion about the interconnection between struggles and events on the level of the revolutionary imaginary at this point. It is my argument, however, that Zapatista resistance, that which keeps the evental situation alive, enhances the anti-capitalist struggles around the world. A betrayal of the truth process of the former would, of course, affect the latter.

The subject of constructed situations

Those caught in the revolutionary imaginary incited by a given event, those in our case actively supporting the Zapatistas, by visiting them, participating in groups of solidarity or engaging in activities (critical or not) that have been inspired, fomented, motivated by the Zapatista insurrection, constitute the second subject of fidelity. Unlike those directly involved in the event – the revolutionary subjects in resistance, the Zapatistas themselves – those belonging to our second subject category, are found at a distance from the actual site of the event, in both geographical terms and in terms of participation in the actual evental becoming. These are the subjects-in-becoming that the Zapatistas address: 'Brothers and sisters, do not sell yourselves. Resist with us. Do not surrender' (EZLN, 1994b, p. 238). I argue that for those from afar caught up in by the Zapatista evental situation, resistance and fidelity are expressed through the construction of situations. Constructed situations, as I mentioned earlier, are collective environments, settings of life which provide the terrain for new behaviours to emerge, for new organisations of life, for new languages and new subjectivities, and break with the spectacle by being directly organised and lived by their participants. They introduce, as Debord (1957) argues, 'a revolutionary alternative to the ruling culture' (p. 50), the outcome of which cannot be separated from the 'history of the movement engaged in the realization of the totality of revolutionary possibilities contained in the present society' (1963, p. 164).

Constructed situations, or the similar '*temporary autonomous zones*', in the language of Bey (1991), bring the evental imaginary into every aspect of life, subverting them and revealing their revolutionary

potential. The Zapatista '*ya basta*' ('enough is enough') is thus projected upon, transfused into fields and terrains that are sutured by capitalist structures and discourses, and it is, as a consequence, transformed, expanded in its meaning and potentiality as it enters the family, the university, relationships, the office, the factory, etc. A constructed situation's relation to an event or eventual situation is that of unconditional but critical support; unconditional support to the rupture, openings and subversion of space and time that the given event represents, but also a critical approach to the processes and workings of the condition initiated by the event in both its own geographical limits and beyond them. In this way constructed situations expand the imaginary of the event beyond its own territorial and political limitations, explore and surpass the constraints of society, and open space for the realisation of a future event, which in turn will produce the conditions where the construction of situations will be an everyday practice.

There is a danger, however (and this applies equally to the subject of resistance as well as to those expressing their fidelity through the construction of situations), that these subjects-in-becoming may idealise their political/theoretical activity and even end up, without realising it, supporting the very society they oppose. The spectacle is now everywhere; there is no longer an outside; the former concentrated and diffuse spectacles have now given rise to unified form, the 'integrated spectacle' that increasingly extends across the entire society (Debord, 1990). One of the spectacle's most subtle control mechanisms is the colonisation and recuperation even of the most radical gestures. As Plant (1992) argues, 'dissent is turned into a spectacle of its own and the rebels become spectators of their own rebellion, consuming the life in which they want to participate, and slotting into a seductive and glamorous role in which they have no real effect' (p. 69). The battle-lines between the progressive forces of contestation and the spectacle's forces of commodification are not easily distinguishable, but nor are they permanent. Rather than descending into a postmodern acceptance of the spectacular power celebrating *à la* Baudrillard (1983), the apathetic silence of the masses, the subject of fidelity to an event engages in revolutionary theory and practice, bearing in mind that the spectacle-isation of society, as Holloway (2002) has shown in relation to fetishisation, is not a given fact but a process which entails a continual struggle of negation, that the recuperated and the colonised can always be reclaimed and that new forms of struggle can be created. In the

concluding chapter I will come back to this second subject of fidelity and discuss further its importance for the preparation of a future event or eventual situation.

Labour and self-valorisation

At this point we can approach the process of the production of subjectivity of those expressing their fidelity in resistance and in the construction of situations from the point of view of what, in the tradition of autonomist Marxism, is known as *self-valorisation*. 'For capital', Negri argues, 'politics is division and hierarchy, for the proletariat it is unity and equality; for capital it means the subordination of labour, for the proletariat it means the process of self-valorisation' (quoted in Beasley-Murray, 1994, n.p.). Self-valorisation refers to the process of autonomous self-development and production of value and subjectivity that become possible through collective, co-operative labour and action. Living labour as a value-creating practice constantly poses the possibility not only of the subversion of the capitalist process of production, but also the construction of new alternatives. And the process of valorisation helps us grasp not simply the production of knowledge, but the production of society and the subjectivities that animate it (Hardt and Negri, 1994). In response to the recent and massive transformations of contemporary society, many authors, often arbitrarily grouped under the banner of postmodernism, tend to approach subjectivity in individualistic terms. Hardt and Negri (1994), however, argue that these transformations, the victory of the capitalist project, and the moving on to the 'factory-society', direct subjectivities towards a positive production of being that has no other means of expression than a radical revolution. Both material and immaterial forms of collective labour are constitutive of the process of social and self-valorisation and reveal new horizons for the production of subjectivity and revolutionary change.

The labour carried out by the Zapatistas, the labour that creates the material, social, affective and intellectual foundations, of what Lorenzano (1998) calls the armed political commune in Chiapas, produces new projects and new subjectivities that animate these projects and express the antagonism between labour and capital. The same is true for the various autonomous political groups that construct situations within the framework of the anti-capitalist struggle. The social labour of these groups presupposes, produces, creates and reproduces values that are specific to given situations, but at the same time touch the very heart of capitalist organisation. The

various forms of material and immaterial labour, and the terrain of valorisation, produce new forms of anti-hierarchical self-organisation and new figures of subjectivity that have the intellectual and affective capacity of challenging dominant structures and discourses and open up the terrain for alternatives to emerge. Marx, Hardt and Negri argue, confined the liberation of subjectivity to a process without a subject, ending up by assuming the birth and development of this subjectivity, as well as the advent of communism, to be products of a sort of natural history. Subjectivity, however, must be grasped in terms of both its producibility and productivity. The subject is at the same time constituted and the constitutive of the vast network of social labour, and consequently subjectivity, is defined simultaneously and equally by its aptitude to produce value and to be produced by it, its ability to produce fidelity and being produced through the expression of this fidelity.

The sutured subject

Self-valorisation is not a process that occurs through isolated individual activity, but rather through one's participation in transformative collective action and labour. In other words, self-valorisation presupposes collectivity. Although we can recognise this process taking place in the subject of resistance and of a constructed situation, the subject in question here is found in a process of subjectivity production governed by individualistic principles, and its self-valorisation is embedded in structures that perpetuate rather than challenge the constituted power. I discuss this third subject of fidelity in relation to the academy and I aim at a critique of the university structure in relation to a reflexive process concerning the production of the current book. The question concerning us then is: 'How is the fidelity of an academic who reads a work on the Zapatistas, or writes a book on them, or of a student who decides to write a thesis on the Zapatistas, expressed, materialised?' The reader should note that although the two previous subjects were collective subjects, here I am forced to talk of an individual subject.

The answer to the above question can be given only in individualistic terms since the subject in question, within the academic milieu, can only attempt to demonstrate his fidelity by responding individually (e.g. giving a talk, publishing articles, etc.). This immediately makes obvious not only the individualistic character of the university activity, but also its isolation from the rest of society, and it presents

us with the conditions that prevent the participants of such activity from becoming subjects of fidelity. By definition bound within academic circles, these individual responses are separated from a unified social practice, and their effects tend to reinforce the isolation of their origins. The result of this closed cycle of production and reproduction of academic knowledge is further isolation, which in turn increases even more the separation of theory from practice, impedes the validation of each for the other, and prevents their fusion into a unified revolutionary project. Separation, isolation and individualism thus give way to an intellectual activity of boredom materialised in 'predictable papers chasing each other in a never-ending cycle of banality; seminars signifying nothing more than the degeneration of the chattering classes' art of rhetoric; and self-serving conferences camouflaging the shortcomings of the intellectually vacuous' (Melancholic Troglodytes, 2003, p. 3). And boredom, slightly paraphrasing the Situationists, is counter-revolutionary.

When the relation between theory and practice becomes an issue of concern in 'critical' and 'radical' academic schools the responses offered tend to reproduce the same individualistic logic governing the university structure and the isolated production of theory; a logic product of the process of commodity fetishism (see Holloway, 2002) that permeates even radical thought and overrides collective action within academia. Debates and articles thus exalt the importance of embracing activism and immersing ourselves in social groups projecting the image of the individual 'good academic' who makes theory with the people out there (e.g. Biglia, 2003). Although collective theory/practice-making is indissolubly connected to the revolutionary project and the production of revolutionary subjectivities, the problem with this approach, in its current rather popular form, is that it fails to engage in a unified critique of the separation between theory and practice, between the university and activism – thus leaving intact the academy as a capitalist institution or only tackling superficially issues of hierarchy – ending up idealising and commodifying the so-called marginal groups, and presenting this kind of activism as a nostrum. A consequence of this one-sided line of thought about the problematic of the relation between the academy and political action encourages involvement with political activity outside the academy almost exclusively at the expense of collective inciting, organising and acting for the radical transformation of the academy; a transformation which inevitably would connect intimately with various forms of political struggle.

In terms of Badiou's (2002) grid of the four conditions that produce truth – namely, art, science, love and politics – it could be argued here that the subject in question is sutured in the condition of love. Love of ideas, of theoretical innovation, of the exchange of views – which often can turn to love of individualistic personal achievements – is the condition that governs the production of theory within the academy today. And it is not love in Badiou's sense, but rather an unrealised and blind love which not only maintains a prudish relationship with politics, but further is often produced and motivated by the demands of capitalist economy as the latter increasingly penetrates the university forcing it to operate according to its logic (Parker, 2003). I conclude that the subject in question is a sutured subject found in conditions that prioritise individual responses and an abstract romance with theory over a unified theory/practice and collective political action, preventing it, in this way, from becoming a subject of fidelity.

TOWARDS A FUTURE EVENT

Despite the fact that Badiou's ethic of fidelity provides an innovative way of understanding the production of subjectivity and political action, there are, nevertheless, two main problems we need to consider here. The first is the production of the event itself in terms of the subjects who directly participate in its production. What Badiou suggests is that before the event there is no subject but only a human animal, a 'someone' entering the process of subject-becoming as a result of his or her seizure of his or her being by that event. Taking the event as the starting point of the subject-becoming, however, Badiou immediately reduces its production to a process without a subject. In other words, his assumption that before the event there is no subject does not explain how the event comes into existence since its production requires that the immediate participants, its creators, invest in freedom, in rupture and radical change, and, therefore, are already in a process of subject-becoming. To argue that those participating in the production of the event have themselves been seized by another event does not solve the problem, mainly because Badiou provides no theory of continuity of events, no theory of a fidelity directed towards another event, and because empirically this is not always the case. In Badiou's theory not only is the production of the event unexplained but the process of being caught by an event

remains a mystery. And since the event is, in a sense, alien to 'what there is', irreducible to existing knowledge and language, a question arises here as to what is in the event that seizes the 'someone' of a given situation and puts him or her in a process of subject-becoming. My argument is thus that there is a kind of subject that precedes the event, a subject who somehow invests in freedom and radical change, and by doing so participates in processes of event production and can also be caught up by events. To account for this kind of subject I need to evoke Castoriadis's (1983; 1991) idea of the 'project of autonomy', which I have discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

The project of autonomy, Castoriadis argues, is a social imaginary signification rooted in the rupture that took place in ancient Greece, and was materialised in the creation of democracy and philosophy as two mutually irreducible poles of reflexive human activity that negates heteronomy and the instituted order of things, the constituted power. As one of the two main social imaginary signification of our civilisation (the other being the unlimited expansion of rational mastery) the project of autonomy implies that a society continually calls into question its institutions, its representations of the world, its imaginary significations, its laws, and so forth, opening space, in this way, for the creation of new forms and a movement without end. The project of autonomy is a socio-historical project of rupture, of indeterminacy, of openness, and it is precisely within its historical deployment that we can situate the event in the order of the political. The subject that participates in the creation of an event or is caught up by an event and enters a process of fidelity cannot be just a 'someone'. On the contrary, it is the historical subject-in-becoming of the project of autonomy, and any involvement with an event is exactly the process of his or her fidelity to this social imaginary signification which the event comes to complement, modify, enrich, expand.

The second problem is Badiou's conceptualisation of fidelity, which appears to me to be a static process without direction. Undoubtedly, the subject of fidelity enters into a multitude of processes of rearrangement and changes that are not static at all. On the other hand, these processes do not lead anywhere; there is no future dimension but rather a fidelity that finds its only reference in the event of the past, and which can easily become a closed and dogmatic fidelity. Two possible reasons, which I will not discuss further here, for this may be Badiou's undifferentiated treatment of fidelity in the four truth-producing conditions, and the influence on his idea

of fidelity of his reading of Saint Paul, who, caught by the event of Christ, becomes subject of fidelity aiming, however, to no event other than, the predetermined second coming of Christ (see Badiou, 2003). In the condition of politics the relation between the events, as I have discussed in relation to constituent power, is somehow accumulative, one event builds on the other in both negative and positive terms, not as a flat continuity but as a radical innovative process of the revolutionary imaginary. As a consequence, then, fidelity to a political event, at least for the subject we defined earlier as the subject of a constructed situation, has as one of its primary purposes the overcoming of the limitations, and expansion of the initial event through the realisation of another event.

Coming back to the Zapatistas we can see that its evental character lies precisely in inciting the imaginary of a future event. And consequently, the subject of fidelity to the Zapatista evental situation directs its efforts in that direction. Generally speaking, the event always contains the seeds of a future event, and, rather explicitly, this is the case with the Zapatista quasi-event too. The Zapatistas have not in any case rejected the idea of an event, of a revolution, although they have prompted a revolution (with a lower case 'r') from below, as opposed to the Revolution (with a capital 'R') from above, in order to emphasise the importance of the variety of methods, degrees of participation, and so forth of the former, and to avoid polemics with the vanguards and guardians of the latter (Holloway, 2003). Their rejection of the Revolution as the taking of power and as a closed utopian project does not mean that they have rejected the idea of the Revolution as such. On the contrary, they have insisted that their revolution is one more step to make the Revolution possible, a revolution that will be as radical in its effects as those of the past, but without closure and blueprint utopianism.

Holloway (2002) misses this point when he implies that the movement's claim to be revolutionary does not lie in the preparation for the future event but in the present inversion of perspective, in seeing the world as incompatible with human dignity. The latter is definitely true, but my position is that it is the anticipation of the future event that is crucial to the claim of the movement to be revolutionary, explicitly and implicitly, and its quasi-evental character, regardless of its obvious reformist tendencies. Some autonomist Marxists, as well as Laclau and Mouffeian readings of the Zapatistas, tend to theorise not the Zapatista imaginary for a real revolutionary moment, a real event that will overthrow capitalism and will re-institute society from the

ashes, but rather the inability of the movement to do so, dressing this inability in the garb of postmodern politics (e.g. Ortiz-Perez, 2000). There is a problem here though, for those who refuse the Zapatista investment in the imaginary of a radical revolutionary moment, of an event, and theorise only the EZLN's reformism, forget that the Chiapas revolt represents exactly, in negative terms, the negation of reformism, the defiance of the end of revolution, or better, in positive terms, the revolutionary completion, at a local level, of years of political struggles. How can we accept that the Zapatistas did not anticipate a proper revolutionary moment when at the dawn of 1 January 1994, after ten years of preparation at all levels, Marcos proudly declared in the streets of San Cristóbal: 'This is a revolution' (quoted in Tellos Diaz, 1995: 16), in order to add few months later, 'that makes revolution possible' (quoted in McManus, 2002: 3). In this quote we can see clearly the two conceptions of revolution – one as an eventual situation represented by the Zapatistas, the other as an event-to-come. The Zapatistas are thus an eventual situation preparing the terrain for a future event.

To enter a process of subject-becoming of the Zapatista eventual situation implies that one directs its energy towards the construction of a future event. Here Negri's (1999) ethical subject of constituent power is more future-oriented than Badiou's subject of fidelity. This kind of subject pursues in its singularity the impossible task of realising the substance of constituent power as a political form of dystopia that aims towards a radical event without the fallacies of a utopia. Its fidelity lies in making of each event a testimonial and of each testimonial an act of militancy. The ethical subject's waiting for an event is committed to the construction of that event as the negation of constituted power and the affirmation of radical immanence. This is exactly what our position between the two worlds in the epigraph by Raoul Vaneigem demands from us. In the final and concluding chapter I will return to this to explore the move of the subject of fidelity towards the construction of a future event. For the time being, let me proceed to a critique of the Zapatista collective subject of fidelity.

5

Reading the Zapatistas Critically

Welcome to the indefinición.

Subcomandante Marcos, 1994

In the previous chapter I argued that the Chiapas rebellion is best described as an evental situation; a term I have maintained for the Zapatistas as a whole to the extent that the movement keeps the effects of the 1994 insurrection alive. Furthermore, I argued that the Zapatistas as a movement constitute a subject of fidelity to the evental situation they themselves produced. In this chapter I will examine certain aspects of the Zapatistas contributing to a critique of the movement as a subject of fidelity. Although the Zapatista resistance proves that the movement has been indeed an incessant subject of fidelity, certain aspects of the movement need to be critically examined if other subjects of fidelity to the Zapatista evental situation, both current and future, are to move forward and break with the limitations of the Zapatistas. This is not meant to be a critical reading encompassing the entirety of the Zapatista movement. What I aim at is to explore further aspects of the Chiapas revolt that have been either neglected or under-discussed in the pro-Zapatistas literature. I will proceed by dividing the chapter into five thematic sections, each one dealing with a specific aspect of the Zapatista discourse and praxis. In the first section, I will contribute to the discussion of the relation between the EZLN and the various sectors of Mexican society, with an emphasis on the EZLN's relation to another guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Popular Army (EPR). In the second and third sections, the focus is on the EZLN's nationalism and more specifically on their emphasis on and defence of the Mexican nation and state. I move from the national to the international level in the fourth section in order to consider the significance of the Zapatistas for the global struggle against capital. In this section, I attempt to elucidate what makes the movement different from other struggles around the world within the context of Empire, and identify the possible future direction this leads to. In the final section, I return to the local level and closer to the autonomous indigenous communities

in Chiapas, and critically discuss one aspect of Zapatista autonomy, the autonomous education, in order to bring to light unknown sides of the indigenous autonomy and counter unnecessary idealisations of it.

REVOLUTIONARIES OR REFORMISTS

Zapatistas and the 'working class'

Neill et al. (n. d., late 1990s), writing from an autonomist Marxist perspective, discuss and challenge the claim that the Zapatistas' use of terms such as civil society and humanity signals the ideology of a popular front that aims to build an alliance between workers, peasants, sectors of the middle class and petty bourgeoisie in order to oppose NAFTA and related forms of 'enclosures' of the Mexican state (see Deneuve et al., 1996). Although the authors correctly identify in Zapatista rhetoric, tactics and demands the 'apparent goal of social democracy via popular front politics' (section III, p. 1), they argue that to stop at this point is to fail to recognise the evolution of the EZLN in the actual context of their struggle. What is important for Neill et al. is to see how the working class has been, during the last decades and under the current political and economic circumstances, expanded so that it now includes a number of social sectors (peasants, workers, housewives, middle classes, etc.), a fact that raises the need for a strategy that unites all these sectors of the working class. Within this framework, then, and beyond their obvious reformist tendencies, the Zapatistas are seen as searching for ways to establish and develop unity within a complex working-class composition.

It is true that approaching the Zapatistas as an attempt to build a multi-class front would mean that one accepts a traditional conception of the working class – a rather restricted conception based on exclusion and the political priority of certain forms of labour. Given that other forms of labour are also defined in terms of their relation to the capitalist exploitation (e.g. housework), and the fact that in the final decades of the twentieth century industrial labour lost its hegemony due to the emergence of 'immaterial labour', makes obvious the need for a new conception of the working class that includes all those whose labour is exploited, and they share a potential to resist the domination of capital. Hardt and Negri (2004) call this kind of conception of the working class the 'multitude', and argue that 'the multitude gives the concept of the proletariat its fullest definition as

all those who labor and produce under the rule of capital' (p. 107). It is within this broadened and inclusive conception of the working class that Neill et al. argue that the Zapatista strategise how to unite the '80 per cent or more' of what is seen as the Mexican working class, against neo-liberalism. In this light, the social-democratic and liberal elements of the Zapatista political proposals (e.g. recognition of the Mexican constitution, revolutionary laws written in bourgeois language, emphasis on indigenous rights, etc.), the lack of definition of the movement, the vagueness of its terminology and its explicit patriotic discourse, which attract a range of political position from neo-liberal 'Marxists' to right-wing Catholics, could be understood, at least partly, in terms of the attempt to unite the various sectors of the Mexican working class, and define a common ground of resistance for all these sectors.

Approaching the Zapatistas from this perspective, however, forces us to make a further step and question the content and direction this endeavour takes. We need to examine how the contradictions and hierarchies existing among the various sectors of the working class are managed, and in which direction. To that extent Hardt and Negri (2004), in their discussion of the multitude, and Neill et al. (n.d., late 1990s) in their discussion of the Zapatistas, tell us nothing about the problems, impossibilities and possible consequences and directions of the attempt to unite the various sectors of the working class and resolve the contradictions among them. In the case of the Zapatistas, Neill et al. not only avoid discussing the direction the attempt to develop and establish unity takes, but they unquestionably accept and implicitly justify the social democratic and liberal elements of Zapatista discourse and praxis as an inevitable consequence of this attempt:

The EZLN indeed included the various sectors of the working class, including small owners, and even has some support from larger owners. As it includes different sectors, it includes the hierarchies and contradictions among those sectors ... But either it is recognized that these are contradictions within the class to be resolved over time in constructing new social relations ... or some class sectors must again propose a state apparatus to repress most all sectors. (Neill et al., n.d., late 1990s, section III, p. 2)

The question, of course, is not whether a sector proposes a state apparatus and represses other sectors, but rather how the contradictions among the various sectors are resolved in practice.

In a country like Mexico where the contradictions among these sectors are indeed huge, it is probable, unless some kind of pacifying mechanisms are activated, that class unity is an impossible task. The way the Zapatistas attempt to deal with the problem of contradictions and build unity is by liberalising their demands and developing a social democratic agenda that would be friendlier to sectors that are more easily satisfied with minor changes. Furthermore, the use of a patriotic discourse functions as a pacifying mechanism. For Neil et al., the use of the language of patriotism by the EZLN needs to be seen in the light of the strategy of building the unity of the various sectors of the working class – an approach that echoes the Gramscian notion of the creation of the formation of a common will with a national popular character. Although this is true, we need to bear in mind that the language of patriotism functions not only as a unifying principle but as a pacifying mechanism too. As Hardt and Negri (2000) argue, although subaltern nationalism has been indeed a progressive fortified line of defence against the powerful external force, it has operated quite differently when it comes to the interior, repressing internal differences and opposition, often in the name of unity. This holds true for the Zapatista strategy too; and building unity has entailed the pacification of antagonism and the silencing of the most radical voices.

Zapatistas and the radical voices

Getting closer to the Zapatista strategy of 'uniting the various sectors of the working class' we see that what this strategy meant in practice was the silencing and isolation of the most radical voices associated with the most impoverished sectors. When, on 28 June 1996, commemorating the first anniversary of the Aguas Blancas massacre, the Revolutionary Popular Army (EPR) made its first public appearance in the state of Guerrero, the EZLN, in common with the government and the Mexican left (PRD), and the majority of the media, would express its rejection of the EPR tactics and proposals, contributing to the EPR's isolation and silencing. The following extract is from a letter written by Subcomandante Marcos on behalf of the EZLN and addressed to the commanders and soldiers of the EPR:

I write to you in reference to an issue which you point out in your declarations. Concretely I refer to your declaration that 'if a wrong should arise which would make the EZLN abandon its dialogue, they would have our modest support as they now have our respect' ... *I only want to say that we do not*

want your support. We do not need it, we do not seek it, we do not want it. We have our resources, modest, true, but they are ours ... go on with your path and let us follow ours. Do not save or rescue us. No matter our fate, we want it to be ours. Do not worry about us ... However, it is useful to point out and repeat that we are different ... the difference is that our political proposals are diametrically different and this is evident in the discourse and the practice of the two organisations. (EZLN, 1996b; emphasis added)

According to Marcos, the EPR created a climate of fear that prevented the expression of the will of different social sectors (see Le Bot, 1997). This, however, was only part of the truth. The EPR was no different from the pre-uprising EZLN, advocating opposition to repressive politics and extreme poverty, and defending armed struggle as a means of self-defence. The Zapatistas had employed the same discourse when they took to the streets of San Cristóbal; they too had created fear on the days of the uprising, and since then on a number of occasions Marcos had played with the image of the armed struggle (but, it seems, only for the theatricality of it). The EZLN and Marcos had repeatedly justified the Zapatista armed insurrection as the only way available to them in a country with no space for democratic politics. However, they seemed to keep this to themselves, adopting a somewhat vanguardist position:

Confronted with deafness and the blindness ... the Mexican society does not have a space where to discuss its demands and finds the door of the peaceful and civil struggle closed. In this sense, perhaps, our role is to show needs and open space. (Marcos, in Meza Herrera, 2001, p. 37)

By 1996, however, things had changed: the EZLN had found significant support in non-revolutionary sectors of the civil society. With all the money, and support from various civil society organisations and NGOs flowing into Chiapas, Marcos had to be careful not to risk anything and maintain the beguiling image of the mysterious guerrilla while appeasing the conservative sectors with a pacifist profile. By the time the EPR made its first public appearance in 1996, the EZLN had abandoned the defence of the armed struggle and the notion of 'dialogue' with the government for 'peace with dignity and justice' had gained prevalence over the military discourse. As Guerrero-Chiprés (2004) argues, the political agreement consisted of containing the incorporating the EZLN as a difference within the system, in exchange for the Zapatista rejection of the military

side of its insurrectionary discourse. Thus, at the same time that the conservative, neo-liberal proposals of several organisations within civil society were tolerated and discussed, the EPR had to be rejected as violent, radical and diametrically different. Constituent power had ground to a halt, the insurrectionary moment was over, the Zapatistas were now an accepted difference within the system, a factor of limited, and controlled instability, and the EPR threatened to destroy the balance that had been achieved and re-incite insurrection.

I do not intend to idealise the logic of the EPR, and the taking of power as a means to bring about change (the EPR had in fact too few forces to achieve such a task), but we need to recognise that this kind of armed group finds support and represents a large and impoverished sector of the Mexican working class, and the armed struggle is still a viable strategy, especially to counter the violence of a heavily armed enemy. Although the EPR received considerable support from indigenous and non-indigenous *campesinos*, and was received with euphoria in the areas where they operated (Guerrero-Chiprés, 2004), Marcos had opposed this group on the basis that 'the EPR had to win its legitimacy in the eyes of the people of Mexico' (EZLN, 1996b) which he specified as civil society, the civil society from which the EZLN gained its legitimacy. Marcos, in other words, spelled out one of the maxims of the Zapatista liberal ideology; the EPR's decision to take up arms was not legitimate unless it found support in sectors that were outside the objective conditions of extreme poverty, violence and exploitation which led the EPR to take up arms. The Zapatistas strategising of uniting the Mexican working class thus seemed to privilege the discourse and logic of certain sectors over others, and the contradictions internal to this class were resolved in favour of liberal and social democratic agendas. For Marcos and the Zapatistas, the engineers, according to Neill et al., of the attempt to unite the Mexican working class, Danielle Mitterrand – whom Marcos had invited to visit Chiapas to support the indigenous cause (see Le Bot, 1997) – was more important and closer to the political proposals of the EZLN than the orthodox guerrillas of the EPR.

Reconnecting with the armed struggle

A few years after EZLN's 'we do not want your support' to the rebels of the EPR, the insistence on peace and dialogue with the government, and the rejection of the armed struggle, things seemed not to have changed significantly. The Zapatista Front for National Liberation (FZLN) had failed to develop into a new political force, and several

other organisations within civil society, or sectors of the Mexican working class, were unable to pose a real challenge to the Mexican state and economic elites, and bring about any significant change. The right-wing turn in Mexican politics, marked by the electoral victory of PAN in 2000, had satisfied a considerable part of pro-Zapatistas sectors of the Mexican working class, which voted for PAN, showing with their support for Fox's Christian Catholic neo-liberal discourse their most radical gesture. Later, the rejection of the COCOPA bill and the passing of a neo-liberal-friendly constitutional reform on the indigenous rights and culture in 2001 demonstrated the limits of the Zapatista strategy as well as the limits of the effectiveness of the civil society. The problematic of civil society, and its inability to formulate a radical political proposal, was posed by the co-coordinator of a forum that took place after the Zapatista March and the rejection of the COCOPA bill with the participation of various organisations of civil society and labour unions:

While the EZLN called a halt to the caravan and started its return to Chiapas, so-called civil society, practically speaking, returned to their homes. They were not able even to maintain pressure on the Congress in order to guarantee the passing of, not any bill, but the one demanded by the EZLN. Even worse, with the Zapatista caravan having arrived at its destination, many sectors of civil society appear to have lost their focus. (Gonzalez Souza, 2001, pp. 9–10; my translation)

Beyond the rather passive reaction of many sectors of civil society, the EZLN had been criticised by radical voices as having been incorporated and contained as an accepted difference within the system, unable to pose any significant challenge to the government. Faced with an increasingly pacified civil society and the critique of being contained by the state, in 2001 the Zapatistas attempted to reintroduce themselves as a radical movement, and reconnect with the other armed groups. Although in 1996 Marcos would say nothing about the structural causes behind the EPR's emergence, he now affirmed that in the state of Guerrero, as in Chiapas, there was 'scandalous social imbalance' and repression that brought about armed rebellion (Subcomandante Marcos, 2001b). In his speech in Iguala, during the Zapatista March, Marcos radically changed his position on the EPR and other armed groups, and introduced the EZLN's new relation to these groups, recognising them as legitimate:

The presence and activities of several political-military organisations demonstrate that Mexico is far from having changed. The EZLN recognises these organisation, among them the Revolutionary Army of the Insurgent People (ERPI), the Revolutionary Popular Army (EPR) and the Armed Revolutionary Forces of the People (FARP), to mention a few, to whom we are grateful for the conditions created to facilitate our travel through the lands in their areas of influence and interest. (Subcomandante Marcos, 2001b, n.p.)

During the Zapatista march, the EZLN reconstituted itself as a radical, subversive organisation, repositioning itself in relation to the EPR and other armed groups. As Guerrero-Chiprés (2004) argues, although the EZLN did not abandon its emphasis on dialogue and peace with justice, it managed not only to reposition itself as a radical movement in the public eye reconnecting itself to insurgent actors previously stigmatised by the regime, the media, and the left, but also to show that it was still able to construct the government as an enemy, and give voice to the EPR and other groups which now were treated more warmly, at least by some media. Whether that repositioning and reconnection with radical groups was only a rhetorical move for shaking perceptions of the EZLN as a reformist guerrilla and as a postmodern rebellion, or whether it marked the beginning of a turn in Zapatista politics remains to be seen. Recently the Zapatistas have made clear that they would not make secret agreements with any politico-military organisations. However, they have not talked against these groups, and have expressed a wish to make alliances and co-operate only with organisations and groups of the non-parliamentary left (EZLN, 2005). This is a new turn in the Zapatista evolution that can potentially take the organisation away from the previously politically confusing approach to civil society and give new directions to its politics.

ZAPATISTA NATIONALISM

As was discussed in Chapter 2, it is only some of the non-academic radical perspectives that engage in a critique of the Zapatista defence of the Mexican nation – a critique, however, that is usually poorly elaborated and theorised. On the other hand, Gramsci, as well as Laclau and Mouffe-inspired approaches, tend to see the use of patriotic language as a completely normal strategy (e.g. Aragonés, 1998; Ortiz-Perez, 2000), whereas autonomist Marxist academics attempt to justify Zapatista patriotism by giving a ‘radical’ meaning

to it (e.g. Neill et al., n.d., late 1990s). In this section I will examine and discuss De Angelis's (1998) distinction of three different uses of the world 'nation' employed by the EZLN; one as the 'ideal' or 'whole' of which the indigenous communities should be part; the second implying 'subversive affinity'; and a consequent third one, more related to strategy, that attempts to challenge the government's reference to the nation and use of patriotic symbols as a means of legitimisation. De Angelis's approach – which resembles Ortiz Perez's (2000) Laclau and Mouffe-inspired approach of Zapatista nationalism in terms of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices – sees the use of the term 'nation' by the EZLN as richer than usually understood, and justifies it as a political strategy.

The nation as an 'ideal'

The 'whole', the 'ideal' in which, according to De Angelis, the Zapatistas want to belong, is what they call the *patria*:

When we came down from the mountains carrying our rucksacks, our dead and our history, we came to the city to look for the *patria*. The *patria* that was forgotten in the furthest corner of the country, in the most solitary corner, the poorest, the worst. We came to ask the *patria*, our *patria*, why? Why did she leave us there for all those years? Why did she leave us there with so many deaths ... The *patria* has to be born again. From our leftovers, from our rotten bodies the country will have to rise again. (Subcomandante Marcos, 1994, in Duran, 1994, pp. 47–8; my translation)

Note that Marcos says that the *patria* was forgotten in a corner of the country. In Spanish the word *patria* (usually translated into English as 'homeland') is more emotionally laden than the word 'country', and carries with it richer sentimental significations of geography, history, race, tradition and the future. What Marcos does, in the above extract, is to incite a strong patriotic sentimentality and the patriotic feelings of the Mexicans, and we can say that his emotive language is aimed, or at least finds an audience in conservative sectors of the bourgeoisie too (see Deneuve et al., 1996). This is a more profound process than a mere strategy to unite the various sectors of the Mexican 'working class', a process whose immediate result is a patriotic conception of politics that now prevails in Mexico. Marcos's patriotism appeals to subjectivities formed with reference to *amor por la patria* ('love for one's homeland'), a subjectivity he shares:

For us, well, I don't know from which generation you are [he refers to the journalist], to us, they taught us, they educated us with something that was called love for the homeland and that's how we grew up. We say love for the *patria* ... we say many things, for ... this is it ... and ... this is what [love for the country] we put above everything ... of course, the intellectuals say that this conception of the *patria* is not possible for an indigenous person, but this is because they [the intellectuals] don't know what the indigenous are like. (Subcomandante Marcos, videotape, 1994a; my translation)

Marcos remains unclear as to what the *amor por la patria* he propagandises means, and where it comes from; but he tries to bestow a 'love for one's homeland' on the indigenous population too. Who are those who educated his generation with the sentiment of patriotism? Does he accept without question a bourgeois manipulated patriotism for popular consumption, or advocate a new kind of patriotism? Those who try to justify Zapatista patriotism remain unclear and vague as to what Zapatista patriotism really means, and put emphasis on 'subversive affinity' in order to give Zapatista nationalism a more 'radical' meaning.

The nation as 'subversive affinity'

As we have seen, Marcos challenges the belief of the intellectuals that the indigenous do not have a conception of *patria*. In fact, here we may have to recognise, as Mallon (1995) argues, that in countries like Mexico and Peru nationalism was not exactly the product of the local bourgeoisie but emerged among the indigenous and non-indigenous peasants who appropriated the concept of nation and democracy from Europe and made it a weapon against colonialism and imperialism. Marcos and the EZLN, then, carry on incorporating the indigenous of Chiapas within the centuries-long national struggle for independence, justice and democracy:

We are a product of 500 years of struggle: first against slavery, then during the War of Independence against Spain led by insurgents, then to avoid being absorbed by North American imperialism, then to promulgate our constitution and expel the French empire from our soil, and later the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz denied us the just application of the Reform laws and the people rebelled and leaders like Villa and Zapata emerged, poor men just like us ... We are the inheritors of the true builders of our nation. The dispossessed ... (EZLN, 1994a)

The Zapatistas are thus part of an historical continuity of the great conflagrations of triumphant Mexican history (see also Rajchenberg and Héau-Lambert, 1998). Indigenous and non-indigenous peasants have clearly participated in all the important events of modern Mexican history – the three most important being the War of Independence, the 1855 Liberal Revolution and the 1910 Revolution – but their involvement in the building of and their participation in popular liberalism have been a matter of dispute in Mexico. Mallon (1995) argues that historians and intellectuals associated with the PRI used to argue that ‘the aspirations of peasants for land and social justice had fuelled all three revolutions and had been answered and realised by the post revolutionary Mexican state’ (p. 5). This conception of history was challenged by the post-Tlatelolco generation, who argued that the indigenous and non-indigenous *campesinos* were continuously repressed and expropriated by the Mexican state. This is precisely what the Zapatistas want to show by associating the participants of the great national events with those who live excluded and marginalised in Mexico’s underground. The combative affinity the EZLN produces, then, has to go beyond a mere recognition of the important role of the indigenous in Mexican history, and define its enemy in an attempt to appropriate the nation.

Appropriating the nation

The identification of the enemy serves two interrelated purposes: first, to show that, unlike the official versions of history, the struggles of the *campesino* aspirations were never realised in the Mexican nation; and second, to appropriate the concept of nation and the combative national history from its deployment and manipulation by the Mexican state. This is done by producing an historical continuity between those who opposed the desire of the people for freedom, and the government:

They are the same ones that opposed Hidalgo and Morelos, the same ones that betrayed Vicente Guerrero, the same ones that sold half our country to the foreign invader, the same ones that imported a European prince to rule our country, the same ones that formed the ‘scientific’ Porfirista dictatorship, the same ones that opposed the Petroleum Expropriation, the same ones that massacred the railroad workers in 1958 and the students in 1968, the same ones that today take everything from us, absolutely everything. (EZLN, 1994a)

The Zapatista strategy is clear: it aims to incorporate the excluded indigenous populations within Mexican history as well as to expropriate the Mexican state's privileged use of nation and its symbols. However, I believe that by limiting our analysis to these lines we fall into the trap of justifying and explaining nationalism rather than trying to do away with it. Furthermore, even after all this has been described and understood, a crucial question remains: where does all this lead us? Where does all this love for the *patria*, subversive affinity with the marginalised of the triumphant Mexican history, identification of the enemy and its historical evolution, the rich and unifying use of the concept of nation, the uniting of the Mexican 'working class' and, in short, all this patriotic hysteria, which constitute the pillar of the Zapatista political discourse, take us, in terms of the future?

National liberation and democracy

To make things clearer we need to distinguish briefly between two interrelated dimensions of Zapatista nationalism. The first is the internal dimension that aims mainly to reconfigure the relation between people and the state and reinterpret the position of the two in history, and has as its main objective the democratisation of political life. This direction is what we have discussed so far, and what academics usually engage in in defending with references to Mexican history and in terms of the EZLN's strategy to counter the hegemonic discourses of the ruling class. The second dimension is an external one that aims to confront the forces of global capital and defend the Mexican nation from capital's attack, very much in keeping with the national liberation strategy characterising many Latin American liberation armies and fronts. This latter dimension of the Zapatista patriotic discourse has been greatly overlooked, and either we see the Zapatista patriotism as an attempt to build an historical bloc, or form a multi-class front or build working-class unity, the question remains as to what all this means in terms of the future in an increasingly globalised world characterised by the decline of national sovereignty.

The Zapatistas have been accurate in their analysis of the global capitalist condition and have demonstrated that they understand what this means for the nation-state. In Chapter 3, I defined the global condition, following Hardt and Negri (2000), as 'Empire'. The Zapatistas have engaged in a similar analysis, and have coined a similar term, in terms of its all-encompassing territoriality and

its economic processes, that of the 'world-state' (in Meza Herrera, 2001, p. 96). Here is Marcos giving an idiosyncratic account of the situation:

At the same time that the national states are destroyed, the world state consolidates itself, but this requires no society, it can dispense with it [society] ... because power is now delivered by the financial markets and the hyper-companies ... The world state needs and produces politicians not in order to run it ... these are non-politicians 'produced' in the centres of 'high' technocratic education (Oxford, Harvard, Yale, Coca-Cola?) and they are exported to different countries in order to complete the destruction of the national states ... for the economic globalisation, the legislative structure of the old nation-state is also an obstacle to overcome. (in Meza Herrera, 2001, pp. 96–7; my translation)

The enemy the Zapatistas oppose is simultaneously inside and outside the nation-state; outside in the form of 'financial markets and the hyper-companies', and inside in the form of 'non-politicians' who execute the directives of those financial markets and hyper-companies. This in turn shows that the two dimensions of Zapatista nationalism are connected through a strong link which is the 'lack of democracy'. It is the lack of democracy that allows the bad government to appropriate national history and symbols, marginalise and impoverish people, and deprive them of their share in the country's becoming; and it is the lack of democracy that allows the same bad government to carry out the destruction of the nation-state on behalf of global capital:

the project of the country that those in power have [is] a project that implies the total destruction of the Mexican nation; the negation of its history; the delivery of its sovereignty; the betrayal and the crime as supreme values ... this project finds in PRI its criminal face and in PAN its democratic face. (in Meza Herrera, 2001, p. 80; my translation)

Zapatista nationalism is inseparable from the project of the democratisation of Mexico. One implies the other, the two exist in an indissoluble mutual relation; there is no Mexico without democracy – because it will be devoured by global capital unless its people can decide otherwise; and there is no democracy without Mexico – because democracy is predicated upon the structures of the nation-state. Thus:

The project of the transition to democracy, is not a transition in accordance with power, which simulates a change so that everything continues the same, but the transition to democracy as a project of the reconstruction of the country; the defence of the national sovereignty. (in Meza Herrera, 2001, p. 80)

Given that for the Zapatistas democracy is predicated upon the structures of the nation-state, and given that the world-state demands the destruction of the nation-state, there is no way left for the transition to democracy from the disengagement of Mexico from the world-state, from the Empire:

When we say that we want a free Mexico, we mean we want it free from economic pressure, free from the financial advice or from the supranational strategies that decide national policies or internal policies. We think, well, that the decisions that affect the Mexican have to be taken by Mexicans. (in Duran, 2001, p. 53; my translation)

Here we have to ask: does Zapatista patriotism differ from that of the National Liberation strategy of other Latin American countries and does it constitute an effective way for the transition to democracy within Empire? My answer to these questions is that there is nothing intrinsically new in the Zapatistas' use of patriotic discourse; in so far as *amor por la patria*, as much as academic attempts to justify it and give it a 'radical' meaning, are at best banal, and at worse conservative and dangerous. Recently, Hardt and Negri (2004) have attempted to prefigure a 'new' kind of patriotism; a 'patriotism of those with no nation' (p. 51), free of elements of nationalism and populism. However, their approach is poorly elaborated, and as in the case of the Zapatistas, it is a residue of old nationalism which, instead of tying to reinvent it, we need to do away with once and for all.

Beyond Zapatista nationalism

For the Zapatistas, patriotism is indissolubly connected to the democratisation of Mexico, but it is precisely the bridge between democracy and the nation-state that we should be suspicious of. As we have seen in Chapter 3, democracy is indissolubly connected to constituent power and constituent power is suffocated within the nation-state. Of course, the Mexican state has emerged under different circumstances (i.e. anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist struggle) from those of the majority of the European nation-states,

but its repressive ideologies and structures are not very different, and any strategy that relies on its defence should be rejected on that basis. Most importantly, the containment of democracy within the boundaries of the nation-state, and the consequent defence of the latter, obscures and negates the potentialities opened up by the new global condition.

It is true that, outside Europe, the nation functioned very differently, and in the hands of subordinated groups, it became a progressive force in at least two senses. First, the nation functioned as a line of defence against foreign domination, and as a weapon for fighting anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles. Second, the nation provided a framework of commonality, and as such it became the way 'to imagine community'. This subaltern nationalism, very similar indeed to Zapatista nationalism, also had regressive aspects, the main ones being the repression of internal differences and the imposition of a homogeneous identity. Given the emerging global condition, however, it is doubtful that this sort of nationalism is still functional and effective. As Hardt and Negri (2000) argue, the present developing condition, the Empire, and the consequent decline of the nation-state, is a structural and irreversible process. The nation, rather than being merely a cultural formation, a shared heritage and sense of belonging, has been also a juridico-economic structure. This structure has now been replaced by the juridico-economic structure of international organisations (e.g. the World Bank, GATT), the effectiveness of which supersedes that of the national ones (see Chapter 3). In other words, we can see the emergence of the present condition as an evolution of nation-states towards a higher structure, a unified whole – what Marcos accurately calls the 'world-state'. To want to go back to the old days of the sovereignty of the nation-state, and take refuge in a Zapatista-style of nostalgia, is not only unrealistic but misses the potential for liberation that the new situation produces.

Hardt and Negri argue that the crisis in the various sectors of the left that followed the 1960s directed critical thought to recompose sites of resistance that are founded either on the localisation of struggles, with the emphasis put on the place-based movements and politics, or the nationalisation of struggle that conceives the nation as the primary mechanism for opposing the domination of the global capital. The operative syllogism of this reactive strategy is that 'if capitalist domination is becoming ever more global, then our resistances to it must defend the local and construct barriers to capital's accelerating flows' (2001, p. 44). The Zapatistas operate

within this reactive syllogism which sees the local and the national as the subjects of the struggle against foreign capital, and they try to resist global capital's proclamation of the nation-state's death. Until recently, the Zapatistas have been incapable of developing, or at least prefiguring, a new direction of struggle against capital, and they continue the defence of what they call 'our *patria Mexicana*' and 'our nation' (EZLN, 2005). To be sure, people have the right to defend themselves against the exploitation and expropriation of their territories and resources. However, to do so we need a new language; one that will unite the working class without dividing it on the basis of nations. Patriotism, left-wing patriotism in this case, even when we can still see it as a viable strategy against capitalist exploitation, should be abandoned as outdated and potentially dangerous.

What the Zapatistas demand is a series of autonomisations of the different levels of the imperial geography, starting from world (nation-) state, and moving back to the autonomisation of the Mexican nation-state from global capital's dictates, and then to the autonomisation of Chiapas against the Mexican nation-state's control. The defence of the local and the national, however, as Hardt and Negri argue, is based on a false dichotomy between the global and the local which sees the former as entailing homogenisation and undifferentiated identity, and the latter as preserving heterogeneity and difference. What we need to understand is that the production of locality and globality is carried out through social machines that entail both homogenisation and heterogenisation. The production of the local and the global are effects of specific regimes of production which create and recreate identities, and 'it is false, in any case, to claim that we can (re-) establish local identities that are in some sense outside and protected against the global flows of capital and Empire' (p. 45). The latter is true whether we talk about the indigenous identities and culture in Chiapas (local) or about Mexican identity and culture (national).

The defence of the nation-state obscures who the enemy is, and disorients revolutionary energies. It masks the enemy because the national struggle puts the emphasis on the nation itself, its continuity, its history, its importance for the people, and so on. The enemy in this approach is external, it exist only to the extent that the nation-states want to be free, to disengage from the enemy (as has been the case with national liberation struggles recent decades). Disengagement, however, is now impossible since the generalised disarticulation of the nation-states' economies characteristic of the Empire (see Chapter 3) would mean poverty and isolation for any nation that attempted to

dissociate itself; and this would be the future of the 'free Mexico' the Zapatistas want. To put it differently, the new developing condition forces us to recognise that we are more and more living in a world state in which nation-states have lost a great deal of their power to act independently and decide autonomously for themselves, and in which their distinguishing lines and connecting fabrics (racial continuity, myths, imaginaries, etc.) are becoming more and more indistinguishable. Rather than disorienting ourselves by defending the nation-state, then, we should now assist in its destruction, push towards its disappearance and enter into the complexity of the new developing situation, directing our energies and struggles against the regime of global relations represented by the Empire, against the world state.

ZAPATISTAS AND THE STATE

Neill et al. (n.d., late 1990s) discuss two strategies that characterised working class struggle throughout the twentieth century. The first focused on wages and employment, either putting emphasis on high wages and full employment or refusing work, based on a relative guaranteed access to wages, as a way of putting capital in crisis. The second puts emphasis on war for national liberation and the seizure of progressively larger parts of a country, aiming at the seizure of state power and top-down control of the economy. Within the latter framework, control of the state is the means for attacking capitalism with the end of establishing socialism. Although, as I have already discussed, the EZLN maintains a very important characteristic of National Liberation strategy, the defence of the nation-state – with all the problems and divisions that the emphasis on nation may cause – we need to consider the fact that the Zapatistas have broken with this strategy by rejecting the taking of state power as a means to implement socialism. This is an element of the movement that has been generally welcome (e.g. Petras, 1997; Holloway, 2002), without, however, having been critically examined and discussed. The emphasis has thus been given to the fact that the Zapatistas reject the taking of state power as a viable strategy, without challenging the relation of the EZLN to the state itself as a capitalist institution. Let me examine the relation between the EZLN and the state further.

As was said in the previous section, nationalism has often been a progressive force for subordinated groups, and the nation has been used as both a defensive weapon and a sign of unity and autonomy.

These progressive aspects of the nation, however, have always been accompanied by powerful structures of internal domination. In all cases of national liberation struggles, Hardt and Negri (2000) argue, new ruling groups are established and 'the revolution is thus offered up, hands and feet bound, to the new bourgeoisie' (p. 133), which becomes a state and undertakes the task of managing the relation of the nation with the world economic system in which the nation eventually finds itself subordinated after the end of the liberation struggle:

Conservatory of the passive revolution, the national state now proceeds to find for 'the nation' a place in the global order of capital, while striving to keep the contradiction between capital and the people in perpetual suspension. All politics is now sought to be subsumed under the overwhelming requirement of the state-representing-the-nation. (Chatterjee, 1986, quoted in Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 134)

The entire chain of representation can be summarised as the people representing the multitude, the nation representing the people, and the state representing the nation (Hardt and Negri, 2000). The first aspect of this chain of representation does not concern us here, and we have already discussed the second. Concerning the third, we have to recognise that the Zapatistas appear to have broken the chain by refusing to seize state power or establish any kind of ruling class in power. At the beginning of their political trajectory, the EZLN made a clear separation between the Mexican nation and the Mexican state. Whereas the latter was held responsible for the death, exclusion, exploitation of and racism against the indigenous populations, the former was idealised and presented as an 'ideal whole' that has been occupied, seized by a 'bad government'. In fact, however, the distinction and separation the Zapatistas made was not between the nation and the state, but between the nation and the 'bad government'. It is the association of the bad government with the state, an association assisted by the historical continuity of the enemy in power that I discussed earlier, that made the Zapatistas appear to be opposing the state.

At that stage, what was perceived as the anarcho-utopian elements of the EZLN coexisted with the language of patriotism with no apparent conflict because both were employed for the war against the bad government, and they never had to confront each other. In fact, these elements served as poetic-rhetorical devices through

which the critique of the state government was carried out. The EZLN, however, never went further than a critique of the government, to oppose the state as a capitalist institution, as an oppressive structure of the nation. And this is because Zapatista nationalism needs the state as the main structure through which national sovereignty is exercised. It was not until Marcos had re-established the relation between the nation and the state as a 'country project' that the utopian elements collapsed or, better, appeared for what they really were, namely poetico-rhetorical constructions and liberal banalities that accentuated the principle of 'command obeying' as a model for running the state through a series of referendums and consultations, and which aimed at constitutional reforms rather than radical change. The state in the Zapatista discourse is thus envisaged as an 'enriched' and 'balanced' state:

in the new relation we are proposing, the representative democracy has to be balanced, it has to be enriched with direct democracy, with the continuous participation of the citizens ... in such way that the alternation in power of the different political forces will not affect society. (Marcos, quoted in Duran, 2001, pp. 50–1; my translation)

What Marcos proposes is, in fact, what already exists with some improvements in its operation. It is the extension of liberal democracy, and its enrichment with direct democracy on a national level. Neither the state, nor representative parliamentary democracy, nor the political parties are obstacles to the transition to democracy and the just country the EZLN dreams of. The anarcho-utopian elements have disappeared completely and have been replaced by reformist demands. The Zapatistas unleashed constituent power in the first days of 1994 only later to reduce it to referendums and control of the state's constitutionality. In Zapatista discourse, the project of autonomy is entrenched and controlled within the mechanisms of the state. When we examine Zapatista discourse more closely, we see that the utopian thought, the practices of radical prefiguring of the future, the opening of the socio-political field which in the beginning the Zapatistas seemed to perform, are all contained within a reformist agenda.

For the National Liberation tradition in general, as for many orthodox Marxists, the state has been seen as an institution, the analysis of which reveals its connection with the capitalist class, and its instrumental use by the latter used for promoting its class

interests. Holloway (2002) argues that such an understanding of the state – which has often been based on the base superstructure dichotomy and the consequent determination of the state by the base – has led to the conception that the state can also exist as a non-capitalist institution; an institution that promotes working-class interests. Within this framework, which puts emphasis on the function of the state, ‘what is to be done’ is to conquer the state in one way or another, and transform it into a socialist state in order to make it function in the interests of the working class. The Zapatistas are still within this syllogism which holds that the state can also exist as a non-capitalist institution, while at the same time they have broken with the practice of seizing state power for achieving its transformation, and engage in bottom-up tactics for its transformation.

The focus on the function of the state, however, tends to take its existence as a social form for granted. Rather than being seen as a rigidified and fetishised form of social relations, the state is approached from the perspective of its apparent autonomy and ‘is-ness’. Taking the state as given, however, leaves no room for an understanding of its production and relative fixity. The state’s emergence as a structure separated from society is peculiar to capitalist societies and it can be understood only as a part of the totality of capitalist social relations. The state, in other words, ‘is not just a state in a capitalist society, but primarily a capitalist state’ and ‘its continued existence is tied on the promotion and reproduction of the capitalist social relations as a whole’ (Holloway, 2002, p. 94). Any attempts, therefore, to reform the state, no matter how radical they are, will be always within the complex of capitalist social relations. What the Zapatistas seem not to have understood is that the anti-capitalist struggle is indissolubly connected not to the reform of the state, but to its destruction and elimination.

In keeping with what we have said about Empire, Holloway (2002) makes the point that the capitalist constitution of social relations is essentially global. What the state does is precisely to conceal the fact that capitalist social relations are constituted globally and hence the nature of the capitalist exercise:

All national states are engaged in a constantly repeated process of fragmenting global social relations: through assertion of national sovereignty, through exhortations to ‘the nation’, through flag ceremonies, through the playing of national anthems, through administrative discrimination against foreigners

... this form of fragmentation, this form of classification and identification, is surely one of the most brutal and savage manifestations of capital's rule. (p. 96)

Holloway directs his insight against the strategy of seizing state power as a means to 'change the world'. No state can be free of a nationalism of exclusion, he argues, no state can avoid the distinction between citizens and foreigners. Even the idea of citizenship is predicated on the definition and the exclusion of non-citizens, foreigners, and the idea of democracy this conception of citizenship produces is a limited and discriminatory democracy. Here we cannot help but ask: is what Holloway criticises exactly what the Zapatistas do through their defence of the Mexican nation, through the acceptance of the parliamentary system and state-based politics, and also through their flag ceremonies and playing of the national anthem? My answer is 'yes', for all the reasons I have already discussed, but also 'no', for it seems that while they defend the nation-state, the Zapatistas manage to take the first steps towards a new internationalism.

ZAPATISTAS AND THE GLOBAL STRUGGLE

A new cycle of struggle

Expanding beyond its own territorial and political boundaries and limitations the Zapatista rebellion marked the beginning of, and inspired a wave of protest which, unfolding until the present time, came to be known as the anti-capitalist movement (ACM), or the 'movement of movements'. Seattle, Prague, Genoa, Washington, as well as Buenos Aires, Manila, Durban and Quito are a few of the better documented incidents of a global struggle, which identifies the enemy as neo-liberalism and attacks the IMF, the G8, the WTO, the World Bank, and their various neo-colonial economic programmes, as being representative of this neo-liberalism. Although it is the Seattle protests that are sometimes taken as the starting point of the 'movement of the movements', it is now widely recognised that the hallmark event of this new cycle of struggle was the Zapatista rebellion of 1994:

We chose to begin with the Zapatistas as we see their uprising on 1 January 1994 as heralding a new era of resistance movements, and we came full circle, ending with their retaking of San Cristóbal de las Casas on 1 January 2003. It reveals the sheer scale and number of undocumented struggles that go on,

almost daily, all around the world ... for those who like their history neat, 1994 emerges as a landmark year ... and as the Mexican economy crashed and burned, the Zapatista uprising took the world by storm. (Notes from Nowhere, 2003, pp. 14–22)

With these words, the contributors to a book titled *We Are Everywhere* introduce their roughly 500-page homage to the rise of 'global anti-capitalism', evoking the significance of the Zapatistas as a political event and their importance for the global struggle against capital. Of course, resistance to capitalist institutions is not new, and throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, from Ecuador to Algeria, from Berlin to India, riots broke out, strikes were organised and people took the streets to protest against capitalist projects and policies. However, as I will explain later, over the last decade we have witnessed the emergence of a qualitatively different form of resistance; a form of network resistance to capitalism which, in many ways, is unprecedented (see *Days of Dissent*, 2004; Hardt and Negri, 2004). The importance of the Zapatistas to the emergence of this new cycle of struggle is undisputable. The Zapatista insurrection inspired and pushed further ongoing struggles; assisted, fomented the formation of new ones, and initiated a process of rethinking radical politics inciting, once more, the revolutionary imaginary.

We can briefly account for this expansive character of Zapatista activity in terms of their political discourse and praxis. The political discourse of the Zapatistas consists of a number of heterogeneous elements, ranging from liberal premises to anarchist ideals, or better, is a kind of synthesis of discourses that, traditionally, have been considered to be incompatible, unbridgeable and opposing. This broadness and lack of definition of the Zapatista discourse, which is by no means without its problems and internal contradictions, has the capacity to reach a broad spectrum of the so-called left (and not only so) and thus become – we risk the word – a 'bridge' between various political groups. In this process, of course, a factor of tremendous importance has been that the Zapatistas have created an alternative in the mountains and jungle of Chiapas; an alternative that, by putting emphasis on collective decision-making and autonomy and attempting to develop in anti-hierarchical and anti-leadership fashion, regardless of whether this is always successful, has managed not only to attract even those who view with suspicion the liberal elements of the Zapatista discourse but, most importantly, to put in

motion again utopian thinking and reactivate the hope that a better world is possible.

Saying that the Zapatistas have become a bridge does not imply that differences between the various political groups and positions have disappeared or that all the political proposals of the left are of equal significance. Some positions and proposals are definitely better than others and fundamental differences among political positions are still unbridgeable. What is important, however, is that, after the Zapatistas, all these positions have found a common reference under the Zapatista banners of 'humanity against neo-liberalism' and '*ya basta*'. The lack of definition, and even vagueness, of the Zapatista discourse has functioned as a kind of glue that brings the various struggles together, despite their differences and disagreements. It is precisely this bridging quality of the Zapatistas that has played a significant role in mobilising the crowds that move from demonstration to demonstration, participate in social forums and create alternatives, and which, despite their questionable radical credentials, have managed to keep open the political terrain.

In the previous chapter, I accounted for the historical specificity of the Zapatista uprising, drawing on Alain Badiou's theory, and Situationist theory, and I coined a new term for describing the Chiapas events. For the purpose of the current discussion let me explore further the importance of the Zapatistas for the global struggle against capital. The two international encounters for 'Humanity and against Neo-liberalism' held in 1996 and 1997 in Chiapas and Barcelona respectively have been the two most central events of a process of building international networks and alliances among various political groups. The details and various aspects of this process have been well documented and there is no need to discuss them any further here (see Cleaver, 1998a; Neill et al., n.d., late 1990s; Notes from Nowhere, 2003). Instead, what is more important is to explore what all this means for the global struggle against neo-liberalism and whether the process initiated by the Zapatista insurrection in 1994 pushes towards the formation of something new.

The open invitation of the Zapatistas to all those implicated in the struggle against capital to visit Chiapas, the two international encounters and the positive response the Zapatistas have received for their initiatives express, above all, the need for communication and co-operation among struggles. From the beginning, the Zapatistas recognised the need for the struggle against capital to be global and that it can be successful only if it is global, and in order to be global

the various struggles have to communicate with each other. The EZLN has expressed this need by proposing two kinds of network; one for resistance as 'the medium in which distinct resistances may support one another', the other for communication as 'alternative communication against neoliberalism' (Neill et al. n.d., late 1990s, section IV, p. 4).

Hardt and Negri (2000) have argued that the figure of an international cycle of struggle based on the communication of the common desires of labour in revolt no longer exists. Now struggles are specific and based on immediate local concerns in a way that they become incommunicable and unable to be linked as a global chain of revolt by identifying a common enemy and developing a common language to facilitate communication:

none of these events inspired a cycle of struggles, because the desires and needs they expressed could not be translated into different contexts. In other words, (potential) revolutionaries in other parts of the world did not hear of the events in Beijing, Nablus, Los Angeles, Chiapas, Paris or Seoul and immediately recognized them as their own struggles. Furthermore, these struggles not only fail to communicate to other contexts but also lack even a local communication, and thus often have a very brief duration where they are born, burning out in a flash. (p. 54)

Hardt and Negri are rather vague as to whether this incommunicability is, in fact, a strength or a weakness, and their argument seems to take two divergent directions: one sees incommunicability as a strength that makes the struggles immediately subversive in themselves without external help; the other approaches the lack of communication as a weakness and identifies the obstacles to be overcome as the political task of identifying a common enemy and developing a common language to facilitate communication. Hardt and Negri seem to read the revolt in Chiapas as following the first direction and seeing it as another struggle responding to local concerns; namely, the regime imposed by NAFTA and local problems concerning racial exclusion and lack of representation specific to the Mexican state.

Although the Zapatistas do communicate local demands specific to Mexico and Chiapas, the movement seems to challenge Hardt and Negri's argument in at least two ways. First, beyond its local-national concerns, one of the movement's primary concerns is to build networks of communication among struggles: 'What we seek,

what we need and want is that all those people without a party and organization make agreements about what they want and do not want and become organized in order to achieve it' (EZLN, 1996a, n.p.). The EZLN's emphasis on neo-liberalism as a 'crime against humanity' seems to have found common ground in many other struggles and thus has contributed to the identification of a common enemy. It is indicative, for example, that during the first International Encounter for Humanity in Chiapas, a substantial amount of time was spent describing and defining neo-liberalism (Neill et al. n.d., late 1990s), and that a number of recent protests have been directed against organisations associated with capital and neo-liberalism. The Zapatista discourse does not only communicate local demands, but has a universal dimension too; it expands beyond the geographical specificity of the EZLN. And it is precisely this universal dimension that has managed to reach a wide spectrum of the broader left, and as such, contributes to the development of a common language. The development of a common language, of course, still has a long way to go. However, the Zapatista banners of 'dignity', 'hope' and 'humanity against neo-liberalism', etc. have provided a basis, a common platform for putting forward the development of a new language. Second, rather than 'burning out in a flash', the alternative created in Chiapas gives duration and relative stability to the movement and enhances the process of the identification of a common enemy and the development of a common language. The Zapatista struggle is not temporal, but the conscious attempt to produce an alternative to the dominant capitalist relations.

A new internationalism?

These characteristics of the Chiapas revolt distinguish it from other struggles and make it a force that pushes forward the development of a new kind of global struggle. Incommunicability, which, agreeing with the second direction of Hardt and Negri's argument, is a problem to be overcome, has been a primary concern of the Zapatistas who have repeatedly, and quite successfully, attempted to burrow tunnels and build bridges of communication with other struggles of varied character. We can take this argument further by saying, following De Angelis (1998), that the Zapatistas have initiated a process and pushed forward towards the formation of a new internationalism. De Angelis (1998) argues that in the old internationalism, the international dimension was instrumental to the national dimension of struggles, and the various movements were subordinated to the

labour movement in an attempt to reach unity. Unlike the old internationalism, the new internationalism is not instrumental to the national struggles and the local international distinction collapses. Furthermore, the various movements and struggles (of women, indigenous, homosexuals, etc.) are not subordinated to the labour movement, but there is an acknowledgement of the autonomy of each struggle and an attempt to build bridges and alliances:

The practice of this new internationalism, which I repeat it is in the process of making itself and by all means it is not an established result, seems to indicate that the notion of unity, a call often demanded at the expense of autonomy, is being replaced by a continuous practice that is defining the characteristics and parameters of unites action in respect to all autonomies. (p. 7)

Within this framework, the Zapatistas are to date 'the more elaborate voice expressing this new internationalism' (p. 7) by defining what is common among the different opposition nuclei and struggles. And what is common among these struggles, according to De Angelis, is dignity, hope and life; a dignity based on the treatment of things as human products and not as human rulers; hope as the rejection of conformity and defeat; life as the right to self-government. De Angelis's argument runs in opposition to Hardt and Negri's when he argues that one of the most important aspects of Zapatista internationalism is that 'people across the globe immediately recognized that the Zapatistas' struggle – and the stories, visions, political methodology, human interactions which accompanied their struggle – was also their struggle in the very sense of the word' (p. 17).

De Angelis, however, although aware of the problems of his argument, following the idealising pattern of most academics, argues that Zapatista internationalism is of a 'totally new kind' (p. 9), and tries to counter, rather unsuccessfully as we saw in the previous section, critiques of the movement's nationalism. The concepts of dignity, hope and self-government undoubtedly constitute an important starting point for opening up dialogue with various sectors of global anti-capitalist struggle, and defining a common ground of communication and the development of a common language. All this, however, is nothing more than a first step, and Zapatista internationalism is not of a 'totally new kind', but comprises elements of the old internationalism as well as elements of the new. The Zapatistas do not represent the new in any case, despite the fact that they have devoted considerable energy in breaking from the old; a fact

that has brought them to a condition in which they oscillate between the old and the new-to-come. In the case of their alliance with other struggles around the world we cannot rule out the fact that, for example, Zapatista internationalism is still contained and limited, in at least in two senses. First, the movement follows a strategy that sees the nation as the subject of resistance to the attacks of international capitalism, and this sets up important barriers to the development of a new internationalism. Second, at least to some extent, EZLN's internationalism has been instrumental to the national-local cause of the movement, and has been proved to be a valuable tactic not only for protecting the indigenous communities from the attacks of the Mexican army and the paramilitaries, but also for providing the autonomous communities with economic support and human labour. Let us not forget that a number of cultural, educational, agricultural and other projects, whose existence is an indispensable pillar of the Zapatista autonomy for various reasons, have been set up and financed exclusively by international solidarity networks. Instrumentality constitutes an important parameter of EZLN internationalism, and, I dare say, lies at its roots. Undoubtedly, however, the Zapatistas have contributed significantly to the development of a new kind of global communication and bridging of struggles whose character, premises and language are still to be made.

AUTONOMY'S BLACK HOLES

If there is an aspect of the Zapatistas that has been almost untouched so far by critical considerations, it is the internal workings of the indigenous communities. It seems that there is a general reluctance to delve into the indigenous reality and produce a critique of the everyday processes of the Zapatista autonomy; a critique that would reveal important contradictions and discrepancies between the public democratic discourse of the EZLN, and the practices within the communities, and would make obvious the need for a closer examination of the movement. The very few critical approaches one comes across, in the form of journalistic research (e.g. De La Grange and Rico, 1997) or some kind of anarcho-inspired political critique (e.g. Deneuve et al., 1996), are usually imbued with hostility against the movement and overt anti-Zapatista and anti-Marcos sentiments. Especially in the latter case, and even when no anti-Zapatista sentiments are displayed (e.g. *Wildcat*, 1996), there is an obvious lack of first-hand information from Chiapas, and the authors tend to

extrapolate and generalise from other historical examples, thus losing sight of the specificity of the context. As far as the academic theories are concerned these are characterised not just by a total absence of any critical assessment of the praxis of autonomy but, at the same time, the internal aspects of the Zapatista autonomy are hyper-idealised and presented as exemplary of self-organisation, of direct democracy, of the manifestation of the principle of 'command obeying' in action, of autonomous education and health, of women's struggle, of democratic organisation of an army, and so on. From Gramscian to Laclau and Mouffean readings, and from autonomist Marxists to Trotskyists, the common element is one: the complete absence of a critical approach to the internal workings of the communities. Turning away from political theory to anthropology, we get an even more disappointing picture. We are told, for example, that in the Tojolabal language there are no objects but only subjects and that it is this 'intersubjectivity' that explains why the indigenous are so accustomed to equality and collective decision-making (e.g. Lenkersdorf, 1999a). Furthermore, women's position in the indigenous communities, it is sometimes argued, is not unequal compared to that of men, women just have a different role in the communities, with the house defined as their main sphere of action (Paoli, personal communication). All this, of course, is a series of naive idealisations since there is neither equality in decision-making, nor are women satisfied with their position within the communities even after the Zapatista insurrection, since they continue to be excluded from the decision-making process. A short visit to any of the Zapatista communities in Chiapas is enough for one to ascertain that the assemblies, where all the decisions are made, are dominated by and often exclusively composed of men.¹

Left academics, left-wing journalists and many activists (mainly related to the academy) all seem to have been heavily intoxicated by the Zapatista poetic discourse and have succumbed to an unquestioning and uncritical support of Zapatista autonomy. In general, it seems that there is a rather simplistic, and often confused, approach to the concept of 'autonomy', which is somehow fetishised and seen as a good thing in itself. Either the term is used to describe the autonomous organising and action of the Zapatistas independently of political parties and other state-related organisations, or it is employed to account for the Zapatista demand for self-management and self-constitution of the indigenous communities, or a mixture of both, the term is seen as implying something good and desirable. For us, however, the concept of the autonomous organisation and

action of the 'working class', or the demand for the self-constitution of a community, does not necessarily lead to something good unless it is accompanied by a conception of autonomy as the continuous putting-into-question of 'what there is', and the realisation that this continuous and conscious unfixing of the established order is what makes autonomy democratic. To make it clearer, autonomy is not necessarily democratic, and its libertarian rhetoric can often serve to camouflage anti-democratic and reactionary practices, substituting the state apparatus with oppressive traditions and local elites. In the case of the Zapatistas, tradition, community customs and authoritarian militarised structures very often assume a dominant role in Zapatista communities, and in certain cases, as I will explain shortly, transform the communities into autonomous, oppressive and authoritarian structures, reducing collective decision-making and the principle of 'command obeying' to mere myths for academic consumption.

At this point we need to consider that the absence of a critical approach has also been, to a certain extent, the result of the relation between the indigenous communities and foreign activists, journalists, researchers and tourists that visit them. The contact between the indigenous and foreigners in the communities is kept on a formal level, partly due to the short period the visitors stay and the language barriers, but also due to indigenous secretiveness. Although the indigenous are willing to engage in conversations about the violation of human rights by the government and paramilitaries, narrate Zapatista stories and answer general questions about the workings of Zapatista autonomy, they always make sure that the outsider never comes close to the community's workings; a process often assisted by non-indigenous 'gatekeepers' who live and work in the communities for some time and assume the role of intermediaries between the indigenous and visitors. Foreign visitors are allowed to see and experience what the Zapatistas and the 'gatekeepers' allow them to see and experience, and what they are allowed to see is, indeed, little. Many visitors, including left-wing researchers and activists, thus leave Chiapas believing that what they have seen is the whole truth and, with the seductive effects of Marcos's elegant prose, they tend to conclude that what they have seen is essentially good. When in certain cases dissatisfaction does emerge as a result of the interaction between visitors and indigenous, and the former have glimpses of the fact that things may not be as ideal as described, these usually are not well founded since the distance maintained between indigenous

and foreigners guarantees, among other things, that information susceptible to critique is kept well away from the latter. We can get an idea of the nature of this dissatisfaction, however, in some reports brought back to the San Cristóbal-based peace organisations by the peace observers who travel to the communities. These reports, albeit rarely, refer to issues of oppression and exclusion of women, lack of information available to foreigners in cases of emergency, and oppressive and authoritarian practices.

For the purpose of this chapter I will focus on one particular Zapatista structure and discuss its workings shedding light on hitherto unknown aspects of Zapatista autonomy. My purpose is to see the Zapatistas for what they are, namely indigenous communities in a process of change, and avoid crude idealisations that serve nobody. I will not consider other aspects of the Zapatistas because I believe that one area of critique is enough to reflect on the movement and break from myths and fallacies, without, at the same time, revealing too much information that can be used by those opposing the Zapatista project. After all, if the communities have been 'closed' to foreigners it is because their secrecy has proved to be a valuable weapon in their struggle for justice and freedom. Nevertheless, as explained in Chapter 3, I see the Zapatistas as belonging and operating on the historical line of the project of autonomy towards liberation and explicit auto-institution of life; a project whose existence is predicated upon the questioning and critique of the instituted order, and which now demands some critical assessment of the ten years of Zapatista autonomy.

Autonomous education

There are several educational projects in Chiapas but until 2002 only one offered secondary education and was recognised by the *comandancia* of the EZLN (CCRI-CG) as the official Zapatista school. The ESRAZ ('Zapatista Autonomous Rebel Secondary School), as the school is known, was situated in, what previously was called the *Aguascalientes* of Oventic in the highlands of Chiapas. In 2001 the school had 80 students, youths aged from 14 to 19 years, who after three years of study were to move into the autonomous communities around Chiapas and work as 'promoters of education'. The school had a very clear hierarchical structure consisting of the CCRI-CG, *el comite* (a three indigenous people committee) which was responsible for taking all the important decisions concerning the school; *los asesores* (a group of about eight non-indigenous who were responsible

for developing the curriculum and teaching the *promotores*); *los promotores* (a group of about 14 indigenous who acted as teachers); and *los alumnos* (the students). Funding for the construction of buildings and equipment come from a US-based NGO called Escuelas para Chiapas ('Schools for Chiapas'). Every year this NGO organises trips to Chiapas for young American students and activists who pay a considerable amount to spend a week learning Spanish (and sometimes working) in the indigenous community. The autonomous school is economically non-autonomous and its existence depends almost exclusively on aid from the United States.

There is nothing alternative in the architectonics of the school, which, due to a mere reproduction of 'what there is', namely the government's schools, or to the conservative influence of the NGO and the *asesores*, is constructed in a traditional way consisting of square rooms used as classes. The building and the general organisation of its interior and surroundings simply reproduce dominant relations of power and perpetuate established hierarchies between the various strata of the school. Beyond its architectonics, however, the school seems to lack the openness, creativity and rebelliousness one would expect to see in an autonomous Zapatista education programme. The following is how the official internet site of Schools for Chiapas describes the difference between the ESRAZ and the government's schools:

Perhaps the biggest difference is that the Zapatista autonomous schools exist directly inside the communities and are the creation of the Maya communities themselves. Unlike government schools, the autonomous schools are administrated and directed by community representatives. The curriculum of the autonomous schools reflect the aspirations of the community and the teachers are members of local communities. (http://www.schoolsforchiapas.org/school_FAQ.htm, accessed 26 March 2004)

One, of course, cannot help wondering whether all this is really such a big difference, and we can see how this 'big difference', is conceptualised, in the text, in term of the idea of 'autonomy'. The important difference, in other words, what makes the ESRAZ different from the government schools, is that it is managed by the indigenous and is situated within the community, thus taking us back to what I said earlier about the fetishisation of the concept of autonomy. All other aspects related to schooling are secondary or not worth mentioning; the way the school is managed and

operates, the actual curriculum, the way this is taught, and so on, all become less important compared to the fact that the school is inside the community and is managed by an indigenous minority. This, of course, is not just a matter of the particular formulation, on the contrary it reflects the actual working of the school and, most important, the particular approach Schools for Chiapas has to the autonomous education, an issue no less important if we think of the influence this particular NGO has on the school committee and the community. Let us move closer to the school and examine the claims of Schools for Chiapas as well as the ideas many academics hold about Zapatista autonomy.

Rather than reflecting the aspirations of the indigenous people, the curriculum, and the way it is taught, tends to reflect the middle-class origin and education of the non-indigenous *asesores*, and thus perpetuates dominant methods and approaches to education as well as Western capitalist views of history, mainstream distinction between sciences, biologisation of life, and so forth, all abstracted from the indigenous reality and imposed on the teachers and students, who have absolutely no say and no control over what they teach and learn. In general, the way things are taught in the school tends to ignore the indigenous reality and produces confusion as well as violent 'Mexicanisation' of the indigenous who have to accommodate a mass of completely new knowledge, that very often contradicts their local beliefs and reproduce it during the mainstream-style examination. Characteristic of the confusion, anguish and violence the new body of knowledge causes – a result not so different from that of the state education system's attempt to assimilate the indigenous into the mainstream culture (see Arias, 1975) – is the following extract from one of my conversations with a student:

In my community they say the moon and the sun are gods, here they teach us that they are planets, and that there are people who have been there and lived there. And in my community they also say that when there is an eclipse of the moon many women are going to die, and when there is an eclipse of the sun many men are going to die. I don't know what to believe. I have asked a promoter [of education] what he thinks, he said he does not know, he believes both are right. (May 2001, fieldnotes; my translation)

Perhaps what distinguishes the autonomous school from the government schools is the teaching of politics in which students read and analyse Zapatista history and relations with the government

and, most importantly, Marcos's writings. Marcos emerges as the principal ideologue of Zapatista youth, and the ideologisation process becomes inevitable. In general the school seems to have missed the opportunity to develop into a fully autonomous democratic space of learning despite the fact that there are no external pressures in terms of completing the national curriculum since the ESRAZ is not recognised by the government and its function is exclusively to serve the educational and political needs of the indigenous rebel communities and the Zapatista movement. Instead, the school is a rigid hierarchical and militarised space which provides mainly Western education that serves capitalist needs and projects more than Zapatista autonomy. In fact, we cannot avoid thinking here that the Zapatista school's structure educates bodies and minds that will be used as a reserve proletariat for the capitalist development of Chiapas at the dawn of the implementation of the Plan Puebla-Panama (PPP).

We could consider all the above as the inevitable evil of a marginalised and impoverished population in a process of change, and perhaps this is how it is. What makes things more complicated, however, is that the change in general is prevented through not merely a semi-capitalist-oriented curriculum, but also a rigid and militarised hierarchy and a decision-making process that imbues the various, clearly defined, strata of the school with a fear of the 'superior'; a hierarchical organisation that produces passivity and unquestioning acceptance of the imposed rules, and makes the enthusiasts and 'cheerleaders' of the Zapatista autonomy sound naïve in their claims. The school is governed from the top down without a single democratic mediation. It is not possible to say what is exactly the CCRI-CG's involvement in the workings of the school is, but as far as the education committee (*el comite*) is concerned, this is responsible for a series of decisions concerning the school function and the students, and all innovations or projects proposed by foreigners as well as changes proposed by the *asesores* have necessarily to pass through its anti-democratic bureaucratic web. Three people decide for about 100 students who are reduced to mere puppets and whose opinion counts for very little, or more accurately, does not count at all. This, of course, is at odds not just with the whole Zapatista discourse about freedom and democracy but with the whole principle of 'command obeying' so much celebrated by the academics.

Zapatista youth (aged 14–19) of the ESRAZ have absolutely no voice, and the anti-democratic character of the school takes the form

of an authoritarian and oppressive structure with punishment lurking everywhere. In fact the school is organised according to military principles, and attending it requires a discipline that generates fear and passivity. Failing to comply with the school's rigid rules, like not doing homework for the next day's classes, talking back or challenging the *promotores* (who often are the same age as the students), incurs military-style punishment such as a two-hour night-shift watch, washing everybody's plate after lunch and dinner, and so on. Deeds of a more 'serious' character, such as talking back to members of the *comite* or questioning their decisions, are punished by imprisonment; the school has its own separate prison-room for 'bringing to reason' undisciplined Zapatista students and uses it when there is the need. Repeating the same 'misdeed' more than once or twice, depending on the nature of the misdeed, is punished by expulsion. Democracy, liberty and justice may be the Zapatistas' basic triad of demands, but it seems that the students of the autonomous school have no right to them in their everyday life.

The way of Zapatista autonomy towards democracy, freedom and justice seems to be a long one and the enemy the Zapatistas have to fight is not just the 'bad government' but also certain indigenous traditions and customs as well as the military logic introduced to the communities through the EZLN. One could argue here that these extreme disciplinary methods are the direct result of the war conditions in which the Zapatista communities are founded. Perhaps there is an element of truth in this claim but it does not provide a clear perspective on the problem. There are a number of educational programmes in the Zapatista zone, and in areas with a higher degree of militarisation, that do not resemble in rigidity and closure the official Zapatista school. A better explanation would be to situate the problem within the indigenous tradition, and the existence of certain beliefs, especially among the Tzotzil people (the ESRAZ is actually in an area inhabited by Tzotzil Indians and all the students and staff are of Tzotzil origin), concerning the importance and necessity of punishment for dealing with certain problems (Arias, 1975).

What is crucial for the future of the school and of Zapatismo as a whole, however, and demonstrates, at the same time, the dynamic for change of the indigenous communities, is that the discourse of autonomy, justice, freedom and democracy is appropriated by some indigenous people and used tactically to challenge oppressive and authoritarian community practices. This is something that characterises not only the Zapatista school, in which some students

formulate their dissatisfaction in terms of lack of democracy and freedom, but also in other areas of the Zapatista praxis and especially the struggle of women. In the case of the school, it seems to be the politics of class, for example, that provides the space for reflecting on political and social relations, and provides the tools for challenging certain practices. The school, in other words, carries within its hierarchical and authoritarian structure the very force of its negation, and although the way to freedom and democracy of the indigenous communities will be a difficult one, the start has been made and is irreversible.

NOTE

1. For a more detailed critical account of the internal workings of the indigenous Zapatista communities, see Barmeyer (2004).

6

The Indigenous Social Imaginary and Zapatista Masks

A ruler wages continuous warfare against spontaneous and uncontrolled transformation. The weapon he uses in this fight is the process of unmasking, the exact opposite of transformation ... If it is practised often, the whole world shrinks.

Elias Canetti, 2000 [1960]

In the previous chapters I have explored the external, public characteristics of the Zapatistas, describing their rebellion as an evental situation, discussing its implications for radical politics and the emergence of subjects of fidelity, and producing a critique of the Zapatistas as a subject of fidelity. In this chapter I will contribute towards an understanding of the Zapatistas from the perspective of the indigenous world-view, a perspective that has been largely overlooked by all the readings I have reviewed in Chapter 2. More specifically, I will explore those local elements that have been significant in determining the character of the movement, and I will discuss the internal processes of change and rupture in the indigenous world-view as a result of the Zapatista political activity. In order to do this I will give an account of what can be called, following Castoriadis (1975), the social imaginary of the indigenous population of Chiapas. The social imaginary, as I have explained in detail in Chapter 3, is the collective manifestation of the radical imaginary, and expresses itself in the creation, construction, production of social imaginary significations – which are collectively shared and do not correspond to any ‘rational’ or ‘real’ elements – as well as the presentification of these significations, the institution (norms, values, languages, the individual, etc.). To approach the indigenous social imaginary I will discuss three interrelated themes, or complexes of social imaginary significations: the ‘metaphysics of selfhood’ of the indigenous people and their beliefs in extra-social aspects of self; the structure of the indigenous languages as embodying and reproducing a certain view of the world; and the indigenous conception concerning the nature of reality that I designate, following Gossen (1996), with the term

'Maya epistemology'. It is not my intention to produce a detailed anthropological account of the indigenous cultures of Chiapas. Instead, I am interested in those elements that allow us to glimpse the native world of imaginary significations in order to elucidate certain aspects of the Zapatista rebellion; to see, in other words, how the indigenous social imaginary permeates the movement, transforms itself in the contact with revolutionary activity and the project of autonomy, and becomes Zapatista social imaginary. In the second half of the chapter I will discuss in more detail the movement of the indigenous social imaginary towards the future; how it breaks from tradition by radically transforming it, producing, at the same time, new emancipatory social imaginary significations. Furthermore, the movement of the indigenous social imaginary will reveal the radical transformation of the indigenous subjectivities and the emergence of a new Zapatista subjectivity. I will argue that both the movement of the indigenous social imaginary and the emergence of a radical collective subjectivity are manifested, expressed, presentified in and made possible by the use of *pasamontañas* (ski-masks/balaclavas) by the members of the Zapatista movement.

INDIGENOUS METAPHYSICS

The beliefs surrounding the nature of self and reality as a whole vary among the six ethnic groups that constitute the Zapatista movement (i.e. Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Tojolabal, Zoque, Chol and Maam), but also among regions and communities of the same ethnic group, and, in some cases, among members of the same community. Beyond these differences, however, ethnographic studies seem to suggest that all six ethnic groups share a very strong common basis; a shared idea that one's life on earth and destiny are implicated in a mutual relationship not just with other human beings but also with entities that inhabit invisible strata of reality (gods, deities and landlords of the forests and lakes, rainbows, the winds, dead ancestors, heroes, etc.) and can be good or bad depending on their character and situation (Moscoso Pastrana, 1991; Guiteras, 1996; Gossen, 1999). A number of rituals and ceremonies have been devised that allow contact between humans and the 'invisible beings' with the purpose of asking all sorts of personal and collective favours. The final word, however, when it comes to contact between the visible and the invisible, belongs to the shamans who are those who have the means of entering the invisible strata of reality and communicate with the beings who

live there (Arias, 1975). Later in this chapter I will come back to this animistic conception of the world and discuss its embodiment in the indigenous languages, as well as to the important role of the shamans. For the time being, let me outline the main component of the native conception of self that forms the thread of the unfolding of my argument in this chapter.

The central category of what can be called the indigenous social self is the *nagual* (or *nahual*). *Naguals* are animal co-essences that share a common spirit with humans. This belief in the existence of animal co-essences is so deeply embedded in the indigenous understanding of what it is to be human that personhood, one's own character, idiosyncrasy, 'powers', talents, weaknesses, and so on, are said to depend on one's particular *nagual*. When a human being is born a *nagual* (sometimes more than one) is born with it and thereafter their lives are indissolubly connected (see Arias, 1975; Moscoso, 1991; Gossen, 1999). The *nagual* resides outside the human body; it lives in its natural environment, which is normally considered to be an invisible layer of reality. However, at least for the most popular versions of *nagualismo*, the animal spirit simultaneously resides in the external world as well as the human body; it is present in a man's heart; man and animal are united; they are one spirit; they exist one in the other.

The belief in the existence of *naguals* varies considerably in Chiapas. There is no agreement, for example, about whether all men possess an animal co-essence or just a few; whether all those who have a *nagual* are in contact with it and are able to use its powers; whether all animals or only specific ones are *naguals*, and so on (see Moscoso, 1991). Beyond these differences, however, there is a general agreement that certain animals such as tigers, coyotes, eagles, snakes and rabbits are *naguals*. When a person has achieved a unity with his *nagual*, usually through dreams, he is able to use all its 'powers' and even take its form and transform himself into a tiger, coyote or any of the *naguals* he is united with. In short, a person's *nagual* is that person's power to act and her potential capacity to achieve things and transform herself into something else. Depending on the kind and number of *naguals* the powers of a person can be more or less than another's. Thus, for example, a man whose *nagual* is a tiger is more powerful than a man whose *nagual* is a rabbit. Physical strength, beauty, intelligence, social power and achievement are usually associated with strong animals like lions, pumas and tigers.

For those situated outside the nagual related discourse the nature of the relationship between the man and the animal remains unclear and is often understood in metaphorical terms (Taussig, 1999). It seems, however, that things are not quite like this. The ethnographer Esther Hermitte reports from Chiapas in the early 1960s:

After questioning along these lines the Indian informant looked puzzled and, often grinning, would plainly state that there is no need for any command [between the person and the *nahual*]; there is no communication between man and his animal co-essence; there is physical proximity; man *IS* the animal. (quoted in Taussig, 1999, p. 243)

The state, Taussig (1999) argues, has always attempted to appropriate the power of the *nagual* and sorcery in order to control the transformation, to appropriate becomings and reduce them to totemic or symbolic correspondences: 'Hence the move from a mimetic to a metaphoric reality, from the smiling man *is* the animal, to the poetic reality, man *is like* the animal, and especially man *has* the animal' (p. 248). The indigenous, however, are unlikely to express it this way; the *nagual* and the man share the same spirit; one inhabits the other; their destinies are the same; man and *nagual* cannot be separated; the man does not have the *nagual*, the man *is* the *nagual*, the man is a being that can transform itself and its world.

In the following poem written by Juan, a 15-year-old Zapatista Tzeltal 'promoter of education' in the *Aguascalientes* of Francisco Gomez in the area of Las Cañadas, we can see two central aspects of the indigenous complex of social imaginary significations: on the one hand, the belief in the living nature of everything, and on the other, the nagualistic conception of humans. The young Tzeltal thanks the mountains and the forests for their support to and cooperation with the Zapatista rebellion. This thanksgiving, which seems to be characteristic of many indigenous cultures, goes beyond a simple poetic imagination and refers to a world where nature can indeed be an ally of the Zapatista struggle; the mountains and forests are alive, they have their *ajaw* (Tzeltal for 'guardian of the mountain'), each of them having specific powers and their distinct character. The successful preparation and organisation of the Zapatista movement means that the deities inhabiting the forests and the mountains of the jungle, where the EZLN military camps are, are assisting, supporting, co-operating with the indigenous struggle and so have to be thanked.¹

Thanks to the forests
 and the hills of the mountains
 They have always been great shelters of all the animals
 that go around flying
 And under the mountains we know
 the tigers are preparing
 to finish off the exploiters.

(November 2000, fieldnotes; my translation)

The word 'tiger' here is used to describe the insurgents of the EZLN, but its use should not be seen as a simple poetic metaphor either. The *guerrilleros* are tigers, are *naguas*; *nagual*, tiger in this case, is their power to fight exploitation, their capacity to transform themselves; it is their metamorphosis, their incarnation as rebels. Note here that the indigenous social imaginary is in action, moving away from a strictly individualistic conception of the *nagual* towards a new collective Zapatista social imaginary signification of nagualism. The *nagual*, the tiger, previously associated with certain individuals in position of power, is now transformed into a collective notion of force, and all EZLN guerrillas are referred to with the same powerful (in terms of its fighting abilities) animal co-essence. The same theme appears in Subcomandante Marcos's (2002) collection, *Stories of Old Antonio*, where, as I will explain later in this chapter, powerful *naguas* are associated with all the Zapatistas.

LANGUAGE AND REALITY

Although the indigenous languages were subjected to a process of violent repression and forced change during the period of the Spanish colonisation – with the destruction of books, the imposition of the Latin alphabet, the concealment of indigenous texts, and so on – languages, however, have managed to survive through time and to a great extent preserve their unique character. The syntax and grammar of the indigenous languages construct and reflect a different way of seeing and understanding reality and the world; they correspond to a distinct vision of the cosmos, and consequently a different way of being human and relating to life and everything around. The introduction of the Spanish language into the ethnic groups of Chiapas as well as the gradual Christianisation of the Maya people, have undoubtedly been significant sources of influence for the local cultures and important changes have taken place in the content

of the local languages. Rather than managing to impose its logic, however, Spanish has been appropriated by the indigenous according to the rules of their own languages and cultures, and, consequently, the foreign linguistic elements have entered the indigenous reality in such a way that they find their place within the Maya ontology without abolishing it. The overall structure of indigenous languages, therefore, as well as the style of appropriation of Spanish, are important sources for approaching contemporary Mayan reality. In relation to the indigenous languages, Subcomandante Marcos (1996) has argued in an interview that

The use of language they [the indigenous] make, the description of reality, of their reality, of their world, has many poetic elements ... Not only had we [the non-indigenous militants] come in contact with the indigenous languages but also with its use, and form of appropriation of Spanish. Indigenous people do not appropriate concepts, but words, and they translate their way of seeing things through a very rich use of language, like for example saying 'my heart is sad' instead of 'I am feeling bad', or saying 'my heart is aching' and point at the plant that is close ... we found that the indigenous made use of language with much more attachment to the meaning of things and to the use of images as well. (pp. 69–70; my translation)

The distinctive features of the indigenous languages, the poetic use of language by the Mayas of Chiapas, as well as their way of seeing reality embodied in these languages is one of the two main constituents of Zapatista political discourse. The other is the urban discourse of the militants who in the 1970s were installed in the Lacandona jungle. It is exactly the coming together of these two 'languages' – on the one hand, the poetic, shamanistic, mystical language of the indigenous people, and on the other, the politicised, urban, 'postmodern' language of the *mestizo* members of the Zapatista movement – that has given form and content to the quasi-mystical political literary style known from the EZLN's writings and communiqués, and defines the character of the Zapatista movement as a whole:

It is this [the meeting of the indigenous discourse with the urban discourse] that started producing this mixture that appeared in the communiqués of EZLN in 1994. It was like being torn between the indigenous roots of a movement and an urban element. (Subcomandante Marcos, 1996, p. 69)

In the following extract of a communiqué, dated 26 February 1994, by the Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee – General Command of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (CCRI-CG), for example, we are presented with this synthesis of the two discourses and world visions: the contemporary Maya oratorical style and the imaginary it brings with it, and the romantic, urban political discourse of the militants. The latter can be easily detected if we bear in mind that words like ‘liberty’ and ‘democracy’, which appear in the text, do not exist in indigenous languages and have been introduced to the indigenous reality relatively recently by means of attempts to raise political consciousness among the indigenous population of Chiapas:

When the EZLN was only a shadow, creeping through the mist and darkness of the jungle, when the words ‘justice’, ‘liberty’ and ‘democracy’ were only that: words; barely a dream that the elders of our communities, the true guardians of the words of our dead ancestors, had given us in the moment when day gives way to night, when hatred and fear began to grow in our hearts ... the true men spoke, the faceless ones ... and said: ‘it is the purpose and will of good men and women to seek and find the best way to govern and be governed, what is good for the many is good for all. But let not the voices of the few be silenced ... thus was born our strength in the jungle, he who leads obeys if he is true, and he who obeys leads through the common heart of true men and women. (quoted in Gossen, 1996, p. 112)

Inter-subjectivity in language

‘True men and women’ is the name by which at least some indigenous ethnic groups call themselves in Chiapas in order to distinguish themselves from the *ladinos* (Arias, 1975), and which in the texts of Subcomandante Marcos has become synonymous with the indigenous who participate in the Zapatista struggle for a better world. The Tojolabal (the name actually means ‘the true men’) is one of these ethnic groups living in the region close to the border with Guatemala, in the municipalities of Las Margaritas and Altamirano as well as in new municipalities formed as part of the Zapatista resistance. I will now move on to outline the structure of the Tojolabal language in order to glimpse at two important characteristics of the indigenous world: animism and inter-subjectivity. As I will explain shortly, the inter-subjectivity found in the indigenous languages has been an important factor for the democratisation of the indigenous communities. An

understanding of the political processes that have taken place in the indigenous communities in Chiapas needs to take into considerations not just the introduction of a revolutionary democratic discourse by militant groups, but also those elements of the indigenous culture, linguistic elements as well as practices, which allowed the discourse of democracy to penetrate the indigenous communities.

In keeping with what I have briefly discussed about the non-visible entities inhabiting nature, Lenkersdorf (1999a, 1999b) argues that in the Tojolabal conception of the world there is nothing that does not have *yaltzil*, a Tojolabal word that can be translated as 'heart', 'soul' or 'principle of life'. People, animals, mountains, clouds, paths, rivers, infra-worlds and supra-worlds, and so on, all have a 'soul', all are alive in a relation of mutual coexistence. Lenkersdorf's research of the Tojolabal people has resulted in a very detailed account of an interesting aspect of the indigenous animism – its embodiment in the actual language people speak and, at the same time, its construction through this language. I will come back to the indigenous animism in the next section and discuss it in relation to *de por si*. For the time being I will briefly describe the inter-subjectivity found in the Tojolabal language, and to a greater or lesser extent all the indigenous languages of the area (Paoli, 1999b), and link it to the process of democratisation of the indigenous communities.

In the Indo-European languages the description of a simple action or event is based on the use of a single verb while in the Tojolabal language two verbs are employed to account for an action. In Indo-European languages, the subject-agent dominates a given situation and the representatives of the indirect objects are found in a condition of subordination and dependency in relation to the subject-agent. On the contrary, in the Tojolabal language there is no such relation of subordination and dependency, but rather a mutual complementarity, an interaction between equal agents, in other words, a linguistic inter-subjectivity. An example may make things clearer. In English the phrase 'I told you' can be analysed in terms of an active subject-agent incarnated in the use of the personal pronoun 'I' (or the corresponding verbal form in other languages), the verb (to tell) which states the nature of the action carried out by the subject-agent, and the indirect object 'you', which defines a passive and inactive recipient of the action, of what is told to the other person. Communication in this case is vertical, subordinate and unidirectional. In the Tojolabal language, on the other hand, the respective phrase includes no indirect object but rather two

subjects-agents who actively and equally participate in a process of communication, and two verbs are employed to state the nature of the action performed. The phrase *kala awab' I*, thus, can be translated not as 'I told you' but better as 'I told, you heard'. In other words, communication is horizontal, complementary and bi-directional between two equal agents.²

This 'equality' of subjects made present in language has found its expression in social practices such as collective decision-making, and so on, characteristic of the indigenous communities. These practices, however, have been largely idealised in the Zapatista communiqués and by the Zapatista supporters, who tend to gloss over or ignore the existence of gerontocratic, masculine and shamanistic hierarchies, as well a number of oppressive structures that traditionally have dominated these communities. Change began to take place gradually, as I explained in Chapter 1, starting in the 1970s through the work of militants who introduced into the indigenous communities a radical political discourse, or what in chapter 3 I have called the social imaginary signification of the project of autonomy. The introduction and acceptance of this new language, however, has been made possible to the extent that it has been filtered through indigenous languages (and practices). The conception of human beings as equal subjects, as well as certain collective practices, has offered the basis for consolidating a democratic discourse in the communities. At the same time, in its contact with the discourse of the project of autonomy, the discourse and practices of the communities have been infused with extra elements that have pushed them away from traditional hierarchies and structures, which previously delimited their potential, towards more radical directions. The communiqué cited earlier in this section concluding with the maxim that 'he who leads obeys if he is true, and he who obeys leads through the common heart of true men and women' (quoted in Gossen, 1996, p. 112), or what the Zapatistas often call the principle of 'command obeying', is precisely the product of the fusion between the imported project of autonomy in the form of a revolutionary discourse and the conception of humans as equal agents found in local languages and practices.

De por sí

As was said earlier, Marcos argues that the indigenous people in Chiapas do not appropriate concepts from the Spanish language but words; words that they often use in a unique manner and

translate in their unique way of seeing reality. *De por si* is one of these appropriations from Spanish which in the indigenous context come to be used in a way that they mean, imply and refer to different things from those they meant previously. *De por si*, or in other regions of Chiapas, especially in the regions close to the municipalities of Ocosingo and Comitán, the corresponding '*ansina es*', itself corruption of the Spanish *asi es* ('this is the way it is'), can be translated as '*de facto*', 'by nature' or simply 'this is the way it is'. The use of this expression in the indigenous communities of Chiapas does not correspond to its use in other Spanish-speaking countries, and it is so often said in everyday language that anyone who visits the indigenous communities in Chiapas, especially the area of Los Altos, soon realises that the world consists of a number of *de por sis*.

'*De por si* the Zapatista struggle is the struggle for democracy', '*de por si* the weather is rainy in this period of the year here', '*de por si* the corn is our staple food', '*de por si* there are the colours on earth', says Subcomandante Marcos (2002) in the 'Story of Colours'. Such and other natural and social *de por si* sentences are given as answers to a number of questions one might ask the Tzotzil people of Los Altos. To those educated in a society in which things can be continuously questioned, *de por si* seems to stop one from arriving at an in-depth analysis of an issue, situation or thing; it appears as a form of essentialism, often fatalism, as the blocking of a question. For the Maya people, however, *de por si* is a moral code in a world where things are alive, they have 'soul', their 'living principle' and therefore their own secrets. *De por si* prevents the violent disclosure of the secret part of one's self that an illimitable questioning can bring about. The attempt to reveal the secret of a being can bring about its anger, or the anger of the gods, with disastrous results for the offender. The following passage by a Tzeltal Indian from Chiapas is informative:

They say it is not good to want to know much about the 'soul'. If one wishes to understand more, one gets ill, one has nausea, headache, the vision blurs sometimes; if one thinks a lot the head degenerates; it is not common to think a lot, one can only think about work, how one is going to sow seed tomorrow, the day after tomorrow. It seems that it is different in Spain, because there one can find books which explain things ... it is like this, in order to live it is better not to ask many questions about 'souls'. (quoted in Pitarch, 1996, pp. 20–1; my translation)

One could definitely say here, and would probably be able to find many instances to support this argument, that *de por si* as well as beliefs pertaining to the nagualistic perception of humans, the shamanistic powers and transcendence of the self have for a long time served as methods of social control. Indeed, the fear and anxiety involved in questioning certain aspects of nature and culture, together with a social hierarchisation based on traits associated with one's *nagual*, and a number of related processes have served as means to control the population and maintain certain social and political arrangements. In the passage quoted above, for example, we can see how the *de por si* of the souls is perpetuated through fear of getting ill, and gives way to a generalised 'it is not common to think a lot' that stops intellectual activity and solidifies the social and political power of certain individuals. Nevertheless, although it is often the case that *de por si* closes the world, justifies oppressive structures and perpetuates hierarchies, it involves, at the same time, the realisation that there is a part of everything that cannot be known to humans, a part not-to-be-known, and realising that not everything can be known releases one from the anguish of the question. Furthermore, *de por si* expresses the impossibility of explaining everything using causal logic; some things happen without explanations; there are things not-to-be-explained but only elucidated (Efrain, 2001, personal communication). There are social and natural *de por sis* (if such a distinction is permissible, especially within the indigenous context); they allow the use of an object, experimentation, knowledge of it, but they always imply one thing – that a part of it remains beyond human reach, outside a logical explanation. The following text with the Tzeltal name *laj yich' oj ta yo' tan te te* ('I explored the tree') successfully captures the nature of *de por si*:

One can come closer in many different ways, from different angles, experiment with the thing, revise the thing, its processes, its surroundings, its way of being, of changing, of being used. But while I go on approaching, it remains something strange. It is the thing out there, in such and such a time, in such and such space ... (quoted in Paoli, 1999a, p. 22; my translation)

Asking about and questioning everything belongs to a world in which everything can be potentially known and, eventually, objectifies the world. Such an objectification, however, is something that appears nonsensical to a view of the world subjectified in language and seen as consisting only of living beings; in a world

where winds and rainbows can be a man's allies, and animals his co-essences; and in a world where causality is not the only pattern that connects things. *De por si*, in fact, reflects certain ideas about the world and seems to be rooted in specific beliefs about human beings' limited capacity to access reality, an issue I now move on to explore further.

MAYA EPISTEMOLOGY

Reality and the man

In the beginning there were only four people who were made of corn, Jaguar Cedar, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now and Dark Jaguar. Each of the four was called 'motherfather', spoken as one word. This is the genesis of man as recorded in *Popol Vuj*, the sacred book of the Quiche Mayas of Guatemala. Tedlock (1993), commenting on *Popol Vuj*, discusses a central idea in Maya epistemology concerning the access human beings have to the different layers of reality; the idea that the downfall of our proto-human ancestors and the ascent of modern human beings involved the loss of vision (Gossen, 1996). In the beginning, the *Popol Vuj* writes, the vision of the first humans

came all at once. Perfectly they saw, perfectly they knew everything under the sky, on the earth, everything was seen without any obstruction. They didn't have to walk around before they could see what was under the sky; they just stayed where they were ... Their sight passed through the trees, through rocks, through lakes, through seas, through mountains, through plains ... They sighted the four sides, the four corners of the sky on the earth. (quoted in Tedlock, 1993, p. 3)

When people still had perfect vision, it was a matter of mere conversation to talk with gods, but things soon changed:

The gods were displeased with the fact that their newly created beings could see everything just as gods could; their vision penetrated all parts of the cosmos, through the mountains and heavens. The gods were not pleased that humans were their equals; their knowledge reached too far.

And when they changed the nature of their works, their designs, it was enough that their eyes be marred by the Heart of Sky. They were blinded as the face of a mirror is breathed upon. Their Eyes were weakened. Now it was only when they looked nearby that things were clear.

And as such was the loss of the means of understanding, with the means of knowing everything, by the four humans. The root was implanted. (quoted in Gossen, 1996, pp. 109–10)

What emerges from this is the belief that people used to be better off in the past, they used to see as far and as deeply into things as the gods did or, in other words, there is a myth, common to many cultures, of a lost paradise; of an era where human beings could be like gods travelling through all the strata and worlds of the cosmos (Cohen, 1991). For the Maya people, as a consequence of their assumed punishment, there is always something beyond and outside apparent reality that is understood to affect perceived reality (Gossen, 1996), in the form of *naguals* and spirits of dead ancestors, divine solar cycles, and so on. Only things that are close can be seen and practical activity has to be limited in the work for the production of what is needed for survival. Remember here what the Tzeltal Indian said referring to souls: 'it is not common to think a lot, one can only think about work, how one is going to sow seed tomorrow, the day after tomorrow' (quoted in Pitarch, 1996, pp. 20–1).

The shamans

Within the opaqueness of reality in which humans have no other option than to adapt themselves accordingly, the shamans have a special position, an open space for their interpretative skills (and political control). Some say that the shamans are the descendants of those human beings who were climbing up the tree that held all the worlds together when it was removed, so that they got stuck between the world of men and the world of gods. Others say that they are the descendants of the man who tried to cut down the tree with an axe, since like him only they can challenge the gods (Cohen, 1991). Whichever version one sympathises with, however, what is important is that the shamans are considered, by natural endowment and training, to have special 'powers' that allow them to go into a trance and travel with their 'spirit' through different layers of reality, to enter the invisible world. The shamans can cure by going to the place where the soul of the sick man is, to negotiate with spirits, to fly, to transport themselves with great speed from one place to another, to foretell the future, to assess situations, to take on animal forms, the forms of their *naguals*. The shamans, for the Maya communities in Chiapas, as it is in other cultures, have a less opaque vision than ordinary men and women, and for this reason

have the respect of the community. The following is an account of an indigenous Tzeltal about the mountain where the souls live and the powers of the shamans:

it seems to be embarrassing to talk about the soul, the 'ave', the 'lab' ... just the diagnosticians, the shamans say few things, sometimes even if you ask them they won't say a lot ... and then they start talking directly with the mountain, with those who live inside, with the mothers-fathers ... well, there are some who really, yes, they know how the interior of the sacred mountain is arranged, it is because they have power, they see it but they cannot say, if they say the mountain is 'like this and that', it means that they will not live long. (quoted in Pitarch, 1996, pp. 19–20; my translation)

Nagualism and insurrections

Nagualism and the shamans seem to have played an important role in previous indigenous revolts in Chiapas. Brinton's (1894) study of nagualism in Chiapas informs us that nagualism became, after the conquest, the source of revolutionary activity and the means by which resistance to the conquerors was organised. Brinton cites two main *nagual*-inspired and shaman-led rebellions in this southern Mexican state. The first was a Tzeltal rebellion in 1713 led by a mystical woman associated with nagualism:

Perhaps the most striking instance is that recorded in history of the insurrection of the Tzeltals of Chiapas in 1713. They were led by an Indian girl, a native Joan de Arc, fired by like enthusiasm to drive from her country the hated oppressors, and to destroy every vestige of their presence ... [She] was known to the Spaniards as Maria Candelaria. She was the leader of what ... Ordonez y Aquiar, himself a native of Chiapas, recognises as the powerful secret association of Nagualism. (Brinton, 1894, p. 43)

After a bloody battle between the indigenous army and the Spaniards, which resulted in the defeat of the former, Maria Candelaria, together with few followers, escaped into the jungle and was never heard of again. The second revolt was that of the Tzotzil people in 1869 and its cause was the seizure and imprisonment by the Spanish authorities of a 'mystical woman', known to the Spaniards as Santa Rosa, who, together with her chieftains, had been suspected of fomenting sedition. Thousands of Tzotzil people marched on the town of San Cristóbal and managed to free the prisoners. The Spanish, however, captured and executed one of their leaders and the rebellion was soon crushed (see also Berlow, n.d., late 1990s).

It is my position here that the tradition of nagualism and its relation to indigenous insurrections is still alive in Chiapas; it is a relation that takes many forms and is present in the Zapatista praxis. We may mention, for example, the re-invention of Votan a local god-hero, in some way connected to nagualism (Brinton, 1894), whom the Zapatistas have explicitly transformed into a more political character, Votan-Zapata (see Le Bot, 1997). Or, we may note, the symbolic use of the number 7, also associated with nagualism, which the Zapatistas have employed on many occasions and without any obvious, 'rational' reason. To mention only two occasions: in 1994 and 1996, Marcos was given the seven emblems and seven messages of the military command (see Montemayor, 1998); and in 2001 the EZLN demanded, as one of the three conditions in order to reopen dialogue with the government, the withdrawal of seven federal military posts from Chiapas. In relation to the latter, without adducing any strategic, tactical or other reasons, Marcos was apocalyptic when he said:

We are not asking from them [the government] all the 259 posts; we are asking only seven nothing else ... those that we are asking are only seven because this is the symbol we always use, but they could be 16 and this would not affect at all their encirclement. (in Monsivais, 2001, pp. 13–14; my translation)

What is even more important, however, is the fact that at least some members of the 'invisible' clandestine indigenous leadership are attributed with some kind of shamanistic clairvoyance. It is important to mention here that by the early 1980s, as Higgins (2004) argues, the shamans had begun to fragment into political fractions, and the shared cosmological framework of the Maya had begun to break down. The intense political activity taking place in Chiapas and the gradual building and preparation of the EZLN meant that those shamans affiliated or involved with the Zapatistas eventually had to rework, democratise and radicalise certain cosmological beliefs in order to bring them in line with the revolutionary activity. Comandante David, a Tzotzil member of the CCRI-CG and a central figure of the Zapatista movement, is believed, among the Tzotzil people of Los Altos to have the kind of shamanistic power that allows him to have access to other levels of reality and a more complete knowledge of things. Comandante David is called, by some Tzotzil communities, 'Sjolimal Svayijel', Tzotzil words that only by approximation can be

translated as 'the man who has his soul in the dreams' or 'the man whose power and thoughts come from the dream world'.³ Note here that dreams are considered by the indigenous in Chiapas as doorways to different levels of reality, and it is often the terrain where a person unites with his or her *nagual*. A similar shamanistic conception exists in Chiapas in relation to Marcos.

Marcos and Quetzalcoatl

'Marcos', say some indigenous in Chiapas, 'is a god', and it is true that in some indigenous churches photos of him are placed next to the icons of Christ and the saints. Some insurgents say that his name is *Comandante leon* ('Commander lion'), implying that his animal co-essence, his metamorphosis, his *nagual* is the lion, the tiger or the jaguar (there is often little distinction between the three among the indigenous in Chiapas); these are animal co-essences associated with power and prosperity among the contemporary Maya and attributed to kings during the classic Maya period. For others Marcos is a shaman with unique abilities and powers that allow him to prevail over his enemies, or he is somebody who is favoured by the gods. His name is said to have a mystical meaning; the letters that constitute it correspond to the first letter of the six towns occupied by the Zapatistas on 1 January 1994 (Margaritas, Altamirano, Rancho nuevo, Comitan, Ocosingo, San Cristóbal de las Casas). Nobody knows how, nobody knows why, there are no clear causal relations in the indigenous world; it was the dream of a shaman, the fulfilment of a prophesy, perhaps just a coincidence, it doesn't really matter, *de por si* it has happened like this. Marcos's place within the Zapatista social imaginary is not simply that of the military commander of the EZLN or the Zapatistas' spokesperson; he is a quasi-mythological persona who incarnates the past, present and future of the Maya world.

The text below is from a song with the Spanish title 'Guerrillero Mesianico' ('Messianic Guerrilla') by Antres Contreras, a popular pro-Zapatista song-maker in Chiapas, who keeps up the tradition of the old *juglares* ('minstrels'). The song starts with the voice of an indigenous woman who, accompanied by background music, narrates the following:

Centuries ago, along with our ancestors a white and bearded man arrived coming from who knows where. And the teachings he gave them were many. Those civilisations achieved great splendour.

One day though, that man left, promising that he would come back, and our ancestors waited for him, dreaming that he would bring new glories on his return.

Centuries passed and other men arrived, who were taken for that Quetzalcoatl. Noticing their mistake they started a struggle that has been continuing for more than five hundred years.

And a white and bearded man arrives in the Lancandona jungle together with the descendants of our Maya race, to revive the old glories and bring liberation.

Only now his name is not Quetzalcoatl. They call him: Subcomandante insurgente Marcos.

(Contreras, tape; my translation)

Quetzalcoatl and his animal co-essence, the plumed serpent, was the Toltec (non-Maya-speaking) god-king of Tula, the seat of the Toltec kingdom, who was associated with the arts, learning, peace and prosperity. According to the legends current to our time, after his defeat and the taking of Tula from the god of war and destruction he is said to have fled into the eastern sea in AD 987, and after the tenth century was remembered in legend as a messiah who would return to bring a new period of peace and prosperity to his people. Similar commentaries exist in relation to Emiliano Zapata who is said to have fled to the east (Gossen, 1996). Within the indigenous world, Marcos is thus associated with the god-king Quetzalcoatl who came back to bring prosperity to the Maya people. And in order not to leave any room for doubt, the song repeatedly and explicitly calls Marcos a messiah, a Quetzalcoatl and a messianic guerrilla. In the person of the white, non-indigenous Subcomandante Marcos the Maya people have found the personification of a myth and the fulfilment of a prophesy, not surprising since traditionally, as Gossen (1996) argues, Mayas have always constructed ethnicity, cosmology, historical reckoning and political legitimacy drawing on symbolic and ideological forms from outside their world, especially those they have perceived as stronger than their own.

ZAPATISTA MASKS

Breaking from the past

So far I have presented three central themes, or complexes of social imaginary significations, in order to approach the indigenous social imaginary, and have outlined how these permeate certain aspects of

the Zapatista movement. I will now move on to discuss the use of *pasamontañas* by members of the movement; how this masquerading can be understood with reference to the indigenous social imaginary and how, at the same time, the masks constitute the symbolic means for breaking with it, and transforming it into the Zapatista social imaginary. We have to rule out from the beginning any attempt to explain the use of *pasamontañas* exclusively in terms of the protection it provides from the enemy. Let us look briefly at this kind of explanation in order to dispense with it.

There are two main reasons why in the case of the Zapatistas protection from the enemy does not constitute the primary reason for masking. First, the Zapatista mask or *paliacate* (the red scarf also used widely to cover the face from the nose down) does not cover the whole face. A large part of the face is exposed and, in certain circumstances, identification is relatively easy. As an example we can mention here the fact that the unmasking of Subcomandante Marcos in 1995 by the government was made possible by means of comparing the part of his face not covered by the mask with a photo of him, proving that the general complexion of the area of the eyes and nose belonged to the same man. Even less important is the protection provided by the *paliacate*, which leaves an even larger area of the face exposed. If masks were exclusively meant for protection, a more effective kind of mask would have been used, like those used by the special police and army forces, for example. The second reason is that it is not difficult to record the faces of the Zapatistas, even of the insurgents of the EZLN, given the fact that during everyday life in the communities people do not wear the masks or use them only on special occasions. The general configuration of the Zapatista zone, combined with the use of simple technology, makes espionage relatively easy. After all, the Zapatistas are known to their enemies; they have all lived in the same area for years, very often in the same community. We have to recognise that at least in some very specific circumstances the masks do provide the Zapatistas with protection. This is, however, only a small aspect of the collective masking taking place in Chiapas and tells us very little about the Zapatista struggle.

Situating the masks within the indigenous social imaginary and the complex of the social imaginary significations means that we have to consider how a certain metaphysics and epistemological viewpoint produce the need for secrecy, for concealing one's identity, but also how masking expresses a dynamic of change, a radical opening towards the future. Secrecy is endemic in the indigenous conduct

in Chiapas; secrecy in conduct among themselves and secrecy in their conduct with outsiders. The invisible forces at work (*naguals*, allied entities, etc.) behind the public manifestations of self imply, in many cases, an intrinsic danger for other individuals. Not only is it the case that, when envy or hatred is involved, one's allied entities can be instructed, by means of sorcery, to cause pain, misfortune or even death to somebody, but also some of these entities are by nature aggressive and threaten the existence of somebody else's entity and therefore his life. Imagine, for example, a case where one's *nagual* is the tiger and the other's the rabbit; the latter is always in danger and living in ontological fear since the *nagual* of the former can at any point devour his *nagual*. This implies, as Pitarch (1996) argues, that social conduct is somehow surrounded by anxiety, fear and suspicion of each other; fear and suspicion that people try to minimise by developing homogeneous patterns of behaviour varying from dress codes to ways of conducting a conversation. These patterns of behaviour, which hide individual expressions that could reveal the hidden part of one's self, one's *nagual*(s), make social and emotional life less threatening and thus keep the social fabric together. Secrecy, however, characterises conduct with foreigners for obvious historical reasons concerning the preservation of indigenous culture. In the following passage, Rigoberta Menchu (1984), from another conflict in neighbouring Guatemala, explains:

We Indians have always hidden our identity and kept our secrets to ourselves. This is why we are discriminated against. We often find it hard to talk about ourselves because we know that we must hide so much in order to preserve our Indian culture and prevent it from being taken away from us. So I can tell you only very general things about the *nagual*. I can't tell you what my *nagual* is because that is one of our secrets. (quoted in Gossen, 1999, p. 243)

Menchu, though, tells us a half-truth here. She situates secrecy exclusively within the struggle against the fearful Ladinos to keep indigenous culture alive which is undoubtedly true. What she does not tell us, however, is that the enemy is not only outside the community but also within, and that one's *nagual* is a secret not only for foreigners but for one's fellow Indians too. The truth that Menchu hides is the enemy within the community. This is the secret the Zapatistas do not reveal either; the secret of fear of sorcery because of envy that is rife among the Indian communities; the fear of deities and *naguals*; the secret of internal gerontocratic

hierarchies and oppressive structures that some anthropologist avoid discussing so elegantly and Subcomandante Marcos so eloquently glosses over in idealisations; the secret of a high murder rate among the indigenous; in short, everything that is omitted from the Zapatista communiqués. This is the secret aspect of *ya basta* ('enough is enough'), the internal aspect of the uprising in Chiapas. And it is precisely this secretive presence that, as Taussig (1999) argues, empowers the determination of the Zapatistas to transform their world; a transformation that passes necessarily through the breaking of the fear, anxiety and uncertainty rooted in indigenous metaphysics and their epistemological world-views.

Let me discuss in more detail the source of this fear and how the Zapatistas attempt to break from it using the transformative powers of their *naguals*.

The punishment of the first human beings by the gods as a result of their god-like ability to see and their practical activity (recorded, for example, in *Popol Vuj*) is a recurrent theme in the indigenous cultures of Mesoamerica and appears among the indigenous of Chiapas too. The account of the Tzeltal Indian that I discussed earlier, concerning what happens to those who try to think about the soul, is also within this broader framework of the unequal and potentially disastrous relationship between man and invisible entities or gods. Suddenly, however, the edifice of the indigenous social imaginary significations started making cracking noises. Although with some differences from the story of *Popol Vuj*, but within the same thematic, in 'The Lion Kills by Looking', one of the tales of Old Antonio, the Tzeltal mentor of Marcos, we are told the story of the mole that was made blind because it dared to look towards its interior: 'And this [capacity] of looking within was something only the gods possessed, and then the gods punished the mole and no longer let it look to the outside' (Subcomandante Marcos, 2002, p. 30; my translation). The mole was robbed of its vision because it dared to behave as those who create forms do, because it started looking at and reflecting on its own thinking and feelings, because it sought in this process the means of transforming itself; it sought the autonomy of its being. Up to this point we are still within the social imaginary of closure and fear; the fear of a transcendental punishment because of one's activity, the fear that prevents transformative activity and keeps thing the way they are. How can the indigenous overcome their condition then? How can they take up arms and rebel against the oppression and exploitation of the 'bad government', and their own 'secret' when

their revolutionary acts can be considered disrespectful, arrogant, vainglorious, and as such incur punishment by the gods, bring about attacks by the *nahuals* and invisible allies of the enemies, provoke the anger of the entities who inhabit nature – in short, threaten their very existence?

The answer is simple: by entering a process of radical transformation of themselves and their world of social imaginary significations, by putting the social imaginary in action once again; and in order to do this they *mask* themselves. Fear and anxiety can be overcome by becoming *los sin rostro* ('those without face'); by hiding that part of the body most closely connected to one's identity, by no longer existing as individuals. In times of radical questioning of the nature of 'self', Emigh (1996) argues, the mask, as both a metaphor and object is a device for taking inventory of its various composing aspects, and most importantly, we may add, of renegotiating these aspects in relation to the world. Although masking occurs in a variety of situations, its predominance during transitional periods attests to its appropriateness as a device of social transformation. Masks express and address the ambiguity of the indigenous point of view, but also elaborate what is paradoxical about appearances and perceptions in the context of that changing view point. As Napier (1986) argues:

Masks testify to an awareness of the ambiguities of appearances and to the tendency towards paradox characteristic of transitional states. They provide a medium of exploring formal boundaries and a means of investigating the problems that appearances pose in the experience of change. (p. xxiii)

The *pasamontañas* are thus the means by which the indigenous Zapatistas incite the creative power of social imaginary, enter into a process of exploring their idea of 'self', overcoming certain aspects of it, changing epistemological viewpoint, and breaking with the fear and anxiety involved in their metaphysical system. There is something more, however, in the Zapatista masking than Emigh's (1996) inventory of self and Napier's (1986) exploring of boundaries and ambiguities. By masking themselves the Zapatistas do not merely produce the space and distance necessary for exploring the boundaries of their cosmology and renegotiating their imaginary significations, but also, by transcending the individual identity, they become a revolutionary collective force, a force more powerful than the invisible entities. It is after they have transcended the limits of the individual self and have become a revolutionary unity that a

sense of freedom starts growing among them (see Canetti, 2000). It is now that they can challenge not only the 'bad government' but also their own 'secret'. It is now that they have become a powerful collective force that they can negotiate with the deities and invisible entities; ask the help of the dead ancestors and the old heroes but also challenge the gods, be indifferent to those entities that might have wanted to harm them or oppose their desire for liberation. The black balaclava is exactly the face of this empowered collective. Old Antonio has not finished his story yet, he pauses while he is rolling a cigarette, then continues:

The mole did not become sad [that the gods punished it] because it continued to look towards its interior. And this is why the mole is not scared of the lion. Nor is the man who knows how to look at his heart scared of the lion. Because the man who knows how to look at his heart does not see the power of the lion, he sees the power of his heart ... (Subcomandante Marcos, 2002, pp. 30–1; my translation)

The metaphysics of closure has fragmented, the fear is broken, it is time for revolution. The mole ignored its misfortune and continued looking at its own thoughts and feelings. Now it is no longer scared; it has no fear of the powerful lion. The same is true of the man who knows to behave as the gods do, relying on his intellect and affective capacity in order to find the means to create. This man, of course, is not the individual but the masked collective revolutionary multitude; it is the latter that has no fear of the lion – the lion as a metaphor for the military machine of the Mexican state; the lion in a literal-metaphoric sense as the extra-social forces, the powerful *nagual* of the enemy. And there is more; in another story we are told that the first seven gods who made the world did not intend to oppose or punish the 'true men and women', this faceless multitude in arms. On the contrary, they endowed them with the power to transform themselves and their world, and, as they transformed them, to create life. And in order

to be able to speak, in order to be able to know things and know themselves, the first gods taught the men and women of corn how to dream, and they gave them *naguas* to accompany them in life. The *naguas* of the true men and women are the jaguar, the eagle and the coyote. The jaguar to fight, the eagle to fly the dreams, the coyote to think and not pay attention to the trickery of the powerful. (Subcomandante Marcos, 2002, p. 89; my translation)

The revolutionary multitude has the capacity to dream, of open utopian thinking, and it has its *naguals*, its transformative powers, in order to make its dreams come true. No longer individual *naguals* to support hierarchies and perpetuate fear and uncertainty, but a triad of *naguals* common to all 'true men and women', to all revolutionaries.

It is the introduction of the imaginary signification of the project of autonomy in Chiapas that incites the indigenous social imaginary towards a series of continuities and ruptures with the existing complex of the local imaginary significations. The project of autonomy as the open-ended questioning of the established order (Castoriadis, 1988a, 1988b, 1991), expressed in Old Antonio's maxim that people ask questions and, by answering, walk through life (Subcomandante Marcos, 2002), becomes nagualism in Chiapas, and nagualism becomes a project of autonomy. It is the coming together of the two languages Marcos (1996) talks about, the politicised language of the *mestizo* militants and the shamanistic indigenous discourse, and their mutual interpenetration, fusion and transformation that opens the way to the Zapatista insurrection. The *naguals* become the forces by which the indigenous bring the project of autonomy to life. The *naguals* of true men and women are transformative strength, constituent power (see Negri, 1999); the tiger for the violence and destruction of the revolutionary activity; the eagle to fly exploring new horizons of creation and prefiguring new worlds to come; and the coyote for the power of the intellect, for open, incessant intellectual and affective activity. When the gods can be ignored even by a stubborn mole, when the *nagual* is not fear but the capacity of the masked multitude to challenge power and transform the world, then life is an open horizon of creation. The *de por sis* have changed too but not in their rejection of a causal explanative logic. No, the indigenous social imaginary is still there projecting itself into the future. Rather, what has changed is that certain *de por sis* have collapsed under the impact of transformative revolutionary activity and others have taken their place. The '*de por si* we are poor' has given way to the '*de por si* the Zapatista struggle is the struggle against poverty', and the *de por si* of not questioning things about the soul of the Tzeltal in Pitarch's ethnography has given way to Old Antonio's '*de por si* people ask questions and by giving answers they walk through life' (see Subcomandante Marcos, 2002).

It is the fidelity to the project of autonomy filtered through nagualism that brings about the eventual situation of 1994. And it is

the same processes, enriched by the changes and ruptures brought about by the Zapatista insurrection, that provide the motor of the Zapatista transformative activity after 1994, and produce, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, a collective subject of fidelity in resistance.

The collective masking is thus the symbolic means by which *nagualism* and the project of autonomy come together. Masking allows overcoming the uncertainty of the new configurations, and the fear of the extra-social. This is why, since the beginning of the struggle, the government has been obsessed with unmasking Marcos, stripping him of his mystique, of his secret that becomes the power of his transformation (Taussig, 1999). As Canneti (1973) argues in the epigraph to this chapter, unmasking is power's way of controlling transformation, of controlling everything the mask represents. But the unmasking of Marcos failed. Marcos was unmasked and re-masked. On 9 February 1995 the assumed unmasking was complete and an unknown name was circulating everywhere in the national media. It took, though, only a few hours for the answer to come from the Zapatistas and their supporters, and we saw the re-masking of the subcomandante: 'We are all Marcos' was shouted by the crowd that demonstrated in solidarity with the Zapatistas in Mexico City. What the government had not realised at the time was that the *pasamontañas* called Marcos had no hidden names; it was not 'Rafael Sebastian Guillén' hiding his real identity behind a black mask, but the faceless face of a revolutionary multitude whose activity had come to inspire and express desires outside the indigenous world. Marcos was the voice of a multitude in arms in a process of metamorphosis, a metamorphosis rooted in hundreds of years of indigenous belief in the *nagual* transformative power.

The New Man

There is an old Mexican play by Emilio Carballido called *La zona intermedia* ('The Intermediate Zone'). The central figure is the *nagual* whose main characteristic is his ability to assume different forms and on whom the coming of a new world depends. The *nagual* is a completely fluid element and maintains his freedom by rebelling against definition. Refusing to be defined, the *nagual* combines characteristics of all the other figures in the play, and it is through this fusion that it maintains its ability to transform itself. Discussing the play Versenyi (1993) argues:

the *nahual*, after his resurrection as a New Man, has been given a chance to utilise his Aztec origins. He is not only a representation of lost innocence caused by the imposition of Christian morality on indigenous forms, but also the potential extension of those indigenous forms into contemporary reality. (p. 133)

The play insists on the potential of humans for self-realisation, and when the *nahual* is reborn as a New Man, he is told that he still possesses its transformative power. Nevertheless, whereas in the past the *nahual* could assume different guises, the transformative power of the New Man lies in his ability to create new forms with words, sounds and action alone. What is at issue in Chiapas, in terms of the indigenous social imaginary, is a past that seeks space in the future; it is a process of gradual transformation of the complex of the social imaginary significations that, as Taussig (1999) argues, 'manifests the sorcery and *nahualism* at work in national and international politics at the end of the twentieth century' (p. 248). Like the *nahual* in Carballido's play, the Zapatistas embrace all the 'characters' who, in one way or another, rebel against or resist the present order, and this is an important source of their power to transform. The black ski-mask of the Zapatistas, the mask called Marcos, represents exactly the fusion of all these characters. The following passage attests to the fusion of the revolutionary *nahual* with the characters of resistance:

Marcos is gay in San Francisco, a black person in South Africa, Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Isidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, an indigenous person in the streets of San Cristóbal ... an artist without a gallery or a portfolio, a housewife in any neighbourhood in any city in any part of Mexico on a Saturday night, a guerrilla in Mexico at the end of the twentieth century, a striker in the CTM, a sexist in the feminist movement, a woman alone in a Metro station at 10 pm ... an underground editor, an unemployed worker, a doctor with no surgery, a nonconformist student, a dissident against neoliberalism ... and a Zapatista in the Mexican Southeast. In sum, Marcos is a human being, any human being in this world ... all that makes power and good conscience uncomfortable that is Marcos. (Subcomandante Marcos, 1994b)

But Marcos, the mask called Marcos, is not the New Man; the mask is the process that opens the way for the new man to come, the process of transformation. Another one of Old Antonio's tales tells us the story of a black god who offered to ascend into the sky and burn himself for the sun to be created and the world to have

light. Like the black god, the black balaclavas are masking the fire that is to burn the old world and the light that will create the new, Old Antonio explains in one of his stories. Like black coal when thrown in the fire, it turns grey, then yellow, then orange, then red, then fire, light (Subcomandante Marcos, 2002). The black masks, like the coal, are the process that brings fire and light. Mounting his 'Voodoo Oresteia', Jean-Louis Barrault (1961) looked for inspiration to the African uses of the mask. Reflecting later on the issue of masks he argued that 'a mask expresses at the same time the maximum of life with the maximum of death' (quoted in Wiles, 2000, p. 148). It is the same with the *pasamontañas*; they represent the death of the old world and the sacrifice involved in all revolutionary activity, and, at the same time, they express the maximum of the desire for life, for a new life to come. 'This is how it is *de por sí*', said Old Antonio, 'to die in order to live' (p. 40).

NOTES

1. As in the case of mountain guardians, the dead too are believed to have supported the Zapatista struggle. When the first guerrilla group started coming down from the mountains of the jungle, where, according to local belief, the dead ancestors of the indigenous people live, and establish contact with civilians, they were able to win the trust of the latter due to the fact, at least partly, that they had survived for long time in the place of the dead and therefore should have had their grace. The rituals of the popular Mexican festival of the 'day of the dead', after the Zapatista uprising in 1994, have the extra component of thanking the dead for having supported the rebellion.
2. In fact, in the Tojolabal language there are no objects, only subjects, although they can be of different kind. The phrase 'I am looking at the mountain', for example, in Tojolabal would be translated as 'I am looking at the mountain and the mountain is having the experience of being seen'. In this case we are presented with another class of subject that Lenkersdorf (1999a, 1999b) calls the 'experiential subject'. This conception of the world, which is depicted in the structure of the language people speak, is something that can be found also between the Tzeltal people of Chiapas and almost all Maya groups (Paoli, 1999b). It is now that we can better understand the Tzeltal 'promoters' of education's thanksgiving to the mountains and the forests. Everything surrounding the indigenous is alive and is treated as such. Through their language the Tojolabal people and, to a greater or lesser extent, all Maya ethnic groups, subjectify the world; the world does not consist of passive objects but of living, active in all processes subjects.
3. As there are considerable differences in the Tzotzil language from place to place it is possible that this name is not the same everywhere. This name was reported to me in a community on the outskirts of the township of Bochil.

7

Conclusion

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

More than a decade has been added to the endless trajectory of the project of autonomy; more than a decade of political and military war, of civil mobilisations, of 'inter-galactic' encounters, of autonomous endeavour and radical political activity. Throughout these years the Zapatistas have been tirelessly struggling and resisting on many fronts, and fighting wars against all kinds of enemies: hostile invisible entities, oppressive community structures, local paramilitaries, the Mexican army, global capital. For more than ten years, with the transformative power of their *naguals*, with the intelligence of the coyote, the fighting power of the tiger and the far-reaching vision of the eagle, the indigenous Zapatistas are transforming their reality, and prefigure a 'better world'. The history of the movement to date shows that the project of radical political change and transformation of life requires ceaseless activity, vigilance, commitment and sacrifices. In this sense, the Zapatistas have been faithful subjects to both the project of autonomy and the eventual situation they produced, or, in their own words, they have been 'the insomniacs that all history needs' since, as Don Durito tells us, 'freedom is like the morn. There are those who sleep waiting for it to come, but there are those who stay awake and walk through the night to reach it' (Subcomandante Marcos, 1999, p. 130; my translation).

One of the purposes of this book has been a critical reading of certain aspects of the discourse and practice of the movement as a subject of fidelity; a critique that I see as an important dimension of deployment and continuation of the project of autonomy. As subjects of fidelity, however, the Zapatistas seem to have explored several aspects of their praxis, and have attempted to deal with certain problems and insufficiencies. As far as the internal organisation of the autonomous communities is concerned, in the years that have passed since my visit to the autonomous zone in Chiapas, and since the constitutional reforms, the Zapatistas have been engaging in intensive internal work, enhancing their bases, building unity and preparing themselves for new wars to come at the dawn of new

neo-liberal policies and plans threatening Central America. The most recent initiative, which demonstrates the Zapatistas' capacity for continuous movement and change, was the creation, in August 2003, of five *caracoles* ('snails' or 'spirals'). The five *caracoles* replaced the five *Aguascalientes* and aim to solve the problems of unequal development among the autonomous communities, to deal in a more effective way with the co-ordination of projects, and implement the San Andrés accords within the autonomous zone. The *juntas de buen gobierno* ('groupings of good government'), created inside the *caracoles*, aim to make direct democracy more effective and minimise the role of the military wing of the movement (Castro Soto, 2003; Duterme, 2004). There is still very little information concerning the depth and effectiveness of this reorganisation of the Zapatista zone, and we are not in position to know how and whether these changes have improved the participation of women in community process, have done away with the power of community and military elites, and have democratised the oppressive structure of the autonomous school (an issue I dealt with in Chapter 5). It is possible, however, that the critical points made by the non-academic radical perspectives I reviewed in Chapter 2, as well as my critical examination of the secondary autonomous school in Oventic (ESRAZ) should now be re-examined and reconsidered in the light of the changes that have taken place in the Zapatista autonomous zone.

Recently, the Zapatistas have also attempted to deal with the hitherto vague use of the notions of the civil society. As was discussed in Chapter 5, the movement tended to include almost everybody under the umbrella term 'civil society', including conservative and even neo-liberal groups. Furthermore, the EZLN, in at least the first few years, tended to have a hostile attitude to other armed groups operating in Mexico. The Sixth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle, however, published in mid-2005, shows the attempt the Zapatistas are making to redefine civil society as those groups whose theory and practice belong to the broader left, and whose struggle is against neo-liberalism. Although the armed struggle is still rejected – the declaration states that there will be no secret alliances with any armed movement, national or international – we can detect the endeavour to re-incite resistance, and remobilise 'anti-capitalist and anti-neoliberal' struggle, as well as building international alliances. What all this means in practice, and whether this new initiative will go beyond the previous failure of the movement to build a strong anti-capitalist front in Mexico, or, as the autonomist Marxist put it, to unite the

various sectors of the Mexican working class, remains to be seen. However, we can say that in the Sixth Declaration there is no clear action plan but a vaguely defined project of building unity among struggles. The reformist tendencies of the movement continue, and the danger that the new initiative will be directed and restricted to the writing of a new constitution is tangible. Furthermore, the nationalistic discourse has not disappeared, and sentimental patriotic language continues to be one of the pillars of the Zapatista struggle. Phrases like *nuestra patria Mexicana* ('our Mexican homeland') which appear in the Declaration show that, despite the fact that the Zapatistas have contributed towards the construction of a common ground for developing a new language, they have failed to develop a new revolutionary language that would allow to defend territories against capitalist exploitation, without regressing to social-democratic conceptions of the nation-state within Empire.

In general, we have to recognise that, on a national as well as international level, and despite the fact that the movement continues to receive considerable support, the Zapatistas have lost the primary role they used to have. The alternative world dynamic of the social forums seems now to monopolise international attention, and Chiapas has slipped off the agenda (Duterme, 2004). However, beyond the defeats the Zapatistas have suffered so far, and whatever the future of their struggle will be, the Chiapas rebellion has managed to win perhaps the greatest victory of all: to re-incite the revolutionary imaginary and initiate a new cycle of struggle against capital. And this is a victory that expands beyond the territorial boundaries of the movement, beyond its reformists and liberal agenda, beyond all its limitations, and touches the very core of the global deployment of the project of autonomy: insurrection. This is what I attempted to convey in chapter 4 by drawing on Alain Badiou's theory of the 'event', and the Situationist concept of a 'constructed situation'. Discussing the Zapatistas, I concluded that the movement could not be seen as a constructed situation since its effect had gone beyond that of a constructed situation. At the same time, the Chiapas rebellion does not constitute an event either, for it has not managed to bring about a rupture, to tear a hole in the situation, the constituted power. On the other hand, whereas the Chiapas rebellion cannot be approached as an event, it did have a clear evental element. And it was precisely that evental element that made the Zapatistas a point of reference for contemporary anti-capitalist struggles. It appeared, then, that the Zapatista rebellion oscillated in a condition between a constructed

situation and an event, and in order to account for this condition I coined the term 'evental situation', which, I argued, best describes the Zapatistas.

In the same chapter, expanding on Badiou's discussion of the subject of fidelity as a result of an evental rupture, I argued that the Zapatista evental situation is a condition that produces subjects of fidelity, and I drew a distinction among three kinds of fidelity in terms of their relation to the evental situation: the subject of resistance (the Zapatistas themselves) the subject of constructed situations (the supporters of the Zapatistas), and the sutured subject (the academic subject). Furthermore, discussing Badiou's notion of the event, I argued that we need to focus our energies on the construction of a new event, and this is what fidelity to the Zapatista evental situation really means. It is, then, the sutured subject and the subject of the constructed situation that have now to undertake the task of producing the conditions for, or realise, a future event. In relation to the sutured subject, I argued that it is to be found in the academy, and I stressed the separation of theory from practice as its main characteristic. This is precisely the obstacle the sutured subject has to overcome, making the production of a unified theory and praxis its main task. At the same time, the subject of the constructed situations has to move beyond the constructions of situations creating, producing and developing the means, tactics and strategies that will lead us to a new event or to a new evental situation.

It is now more than clear that what is urgently needed in order to pave the way for a future event is a new theory of revolutionary action. In Chapter 2, I presented and reviewed four perspectives that have been commonly employed in order to elucidate and theorise aspects of the Zapatista rebellion (i.e. Laclau and Mouffeian, Gramscian, autonomist Marxist and non-academic radical perspectives). The problem with the readings of the Zapatistas based on these theories and perspectives, I argued, and despite the fact that they do shed light on certain aspects of the movement, is that they are mainly uncritical or engage in a poorly elaborated and theoretical critique of the discourse and practice of the Zapatistas, they fail to account for the unique character of the movement, and almost completely ignore subjectivity in their analyses. What these readings show us, however, is not only their inability to read the Zapatistas, but, most importantly, they reflect stagnation, lack of imagination and the reformist tendencies characterising contemporary 'radical' theory. Aspects of the movement are indeed elucidated and explained – with

often few differences among the three academic perspectives, and rather stereotypically by the non-academics – but then we cannot help but ask: ‘Now what?’ The Zapatistas are treated, with very few exceptions – Holloway’s (2002) work being one – almost as an object of natural sciences, and the implications and potentialities for the future disappear, collapse in the meticulousness of an uncritical and uncreative reading of the present, or, at best, are superficially mentioned. The inability to read the Zapatistas as a unique phenomenon among contemporary struggles reflects the inability of any of these theories to produce a radical opening towards the future. What we need are theories of radical action; theories that will go beyond a mere analysis of the present and will invent a new radical politics. As Badiou (2003a) has argued, if we stick to a general analysis of the global situation, we will conclude that any radical attempt is destined to fail. And it is true that the Zapatista rebellion was made possible through engagement in an independent politics that moved beyond the analysis of the objective, unfavourable global conditions for such an endeavour. This is precisely the quixotic madness the Zapatistas have evoked in engaging in radical politics. The task of the sutured subject, then; the task of the academic caught by the Zapatista eventual situation, is to explore theoretical possibilities that can become radical action; not theories that simply explain aspects of the present, not theories that will explain what may happen in the future, not theories for the sake of theory and an abstract production of academic knowledge, but theories of radical action that will burst through the limits of the academic classrooms and journals, will invent new languages free of patriotism and reformism, and will be militantly implanted in the multitude, and will be further enriched, transformed and modified in the contact with it.

Although it has not been the purpose of this book to develop or prefigure such a theory of radical action, I have attempted to read the Zapatistas in a new way, combining a variety of theoretical resources, in order to see the possibilities opened by the movement. In Chapter 3, I constructed a theoretical framework drawing on Castoriadis’s notion of the project of autonomy, Negri’s discussions of constituent power, and Hardt and Negri’s notion of Empire. This framework was taken further in chapter 4 with the discussion of Badiou’s notion of the event, and the utilisation of other theoretical resources, mainly Situationist theory and some references to Laclau and Mouffe’s theory, and the autonomist Marxist concept of self-valorisation. I am aware that some readers may find this mixture of theories

annoying, and may argue that I blur important differences among theories and authors, that the theories employed are incompatible and, consequently, my framework problematic, that my readings of certain theories are idiosyncratic. There is an element of truth in all this. However, my aim has not been to produce a new theory or to faithfully follow certain theory(ies), but rather to break with the tendency to employ a single theory or perspective in order to read the Zapatistas. This move has allowed me to move freely among the theories, producing a critical reading of the Zapatistas, explore their uniqueness and the implications of the movement for the future. Furthermore, by drawing on a number of diverse resources, I have attempted to destabilise and relativise the theoretical complex, in relation to the Zapatistas, and thus make space for the emergences of new theories of radical action. I hope I have not failed completely.

Earlier I mentioned that the task of the sutured subject is to engage militantly in theoretical activity with the multitude. The second subject of fidelity, the subject of constructed situations, can be approached in terms of Hardt and Negri's (2004) concept of the multitude, which I briefly mentioned in Chapter 3, drawing on previous work by Negri. Discussing this subject as a result of the Zapatista evental situation, I argued that its task is to construct situations of various kinds producing the conditions for the coming of a new event. However, in common with Hardt and Negri's discussion of the multitude, this appears now to be only a minimal condition. Hardt and Negri have discussed the multitude as composed of radical differences, singularities, as polyphonic and carnivalesque. The protests of the multitude that have risen up around questions of globalisation, they argue, produce a space of experimentation where imagination is linked to desire and utopia. These protests combine theatricality and imagination, and there is a constant dialogue between diverse and singular subjects, and a polyphonic composition of them.

These protests can be seen as a large-scale, constructed situation, and many of the elements Hardt and Negri describe are present in these protests. However, we need to recognise that this kind of action can hardly take us forward towards the construction of a new event. Badiou (2003a) has rightly argued that the new cycle of anti-globalisation protests is a somewhat wild operator of capitalist globalisation itself that 'seeks to sketch out, for the imminent future, the new forms of comfort to be enjoyed by our planet's idle petit bourgeoisie' (p. 125). The creativity of the multitude, celebrated by Hardt and

Negri, for Badiou is nothing more than ordinary performances from the well worn repertoire of the petty-bourgeois mass movement, 'noisily laying claim to the right to enjoy without doing anything, while taking special care to avoid any for of discipline' (p. 126). For Badiou, then, and given that discipline is the key to truths, the task of politics is to construct a new form of discipline that will replace the saturated discipline of the parties. Furthermore, Badiou criticises these protests for being archaic and sterile, with the insurrectional forces (even if in them the insurrectional schema is considerably weakened) congregating around the economico-political ceremonies of the adversary. There is no long-term independent political strategy according to which tactics are developed and places chosen for action. Instead, what we see is the multitude appearing where they are expected to appear, in the places where governments and global banking institutions hold their meetings. The subtractive imperative, then, would be: 'Never appear where you are most expected. Make sure that your own action is not undertaken on terrain decided by your adversary' (2003a, p. 120).

The pre-history of the Zapatista rebellion, the processes and activity that brought about the eventual situation of 1994, a pre-history I briefly presented in Chapter 1, shows us precisely this: the need for discipline, and the importance of taking the enemy by surprise. For more than ten years the Zapatistas were organising their bases, building an army, forming common ground for struggle, democratising their communities, developing strategies. Discipline, as I understand it, was precisely this, the determination to work together for a collective purpose, the sacrifices that everybody involved in the struggle made in order to contribute to the building of the organisation, the abandonment of individualistic interests for the common good, the faithfulness to the principles and objectives they collectively developed, active participation in an clandestine organisation. This is one of the great bequests of the Zapatistas to the multitude; the need for discipline, for conscious, incessant work, for organisation, for building an army, for the development of a common basis, of collective goals.

Secrecy is imperative in all this and an indispensable element of Badiou's maxim of never appear where one is expected. The indigenous social imaginary provided a strong basis for such secrecy. According to Jacinto de La Serna, writing *circa* 1650, the significance of the term *nagual* or *nahual* stems from the Mexican Indian verb *nahuatlín*, which means 'to hide oneself', 'to cover oneself' or 'to

disguise oneself' (Higgins, 2004). Nagualism has been an important a component of the indigenous social imaginary; it can even be considered as a local theory, whose contact with the imaginary signification of the project of autonomy, implanted in Chiapas in the form of Marxism by the militant groups, obtained a radical social character and became a force of transformation. In Chapter 6, I explained in detail how the collective masking taking place in Chiapas with the common use of the ski-mask – which becomes the means for transcending ontological fears endemic in indigenous metaphysics and represents a collective transformative project – can be understood only by reference to the indigenous social imaginary in general, and nagualism in particular. Nagualism, however, seems also to have provided a basis for a metaphorical masking as collective concealment from the enemy. When the Zapatistas started organising themselves, nagualism begins gradually losing its individualistic character as 'hiding oneself from the others', and becomes a collective hiding from the enemy. And it is this ten years of collective hiding in the misty mountains of the jungle, which provided something like a natural *pasamontañas*, that allowed the Zapatistas to become strong and strike a blow at the enemy. The task of the multitude then, the task of the subject of constructed situations, is to hide, organise in silence, arm and attack.

TOWARDS A THEORY OF MILITANT SUBJECTIVITY

Throughout this book, I have treated the subjects of fidelity to the Zapatista eventual situation as collective subjects. However, this should not prevent us from examining the fidelity of the individual militant too. As explained in Chapter 4, Badiou's starting point for discussing fidelity is the event as a radical rupture in the situation, which brings someone to a process of subject-becoming. The problem with this approach, I argued, is that by taking the event as the starting point of fidelity it remains oblivious to the kind of fidelities that precede the event. In order to deal with this problem I evoked Castoriadis's notion of the project of autonomy as a socio-historical project and argued that there is a subject that precedes the event; the subject of the project of autonomy who, by being faithful to this social imaginary signification, engages in radical political activity and participates actively in the production of an event, or eventual situation. It is true, of course, that the event cannot be determined or predicted, however, a certain kind of political activity can always explore the

conditions and possibilities of a given situation which, directly or indirectly, will open the way for a future event. Although it is not my intention to engage in a detailed discussion of the pre-evental fidelities, and I do not intend to produce a theory of pre-evental subjectivity, I will briefly outline a form of individual fidelity which, in interaction with a given collectivity, incites the conditions that radicalise the collectivity, transforms it to a pre-evental subject and opens up possibilities for the creation of an event.

The individual histories of the FLN militants, the histories of the second wave of militants who arrived in Chiapas in the early 1980s, including Marcos, as well as the personal histories of indigenous militants, show us the playing out of subjectivity as a personal decision to commit oneself to a radical political project. In some cases, as is the case of Subcomandante Marcos, this decision entailed a radical rupture in one's life, and it was precisely that rupture that was constitutive of their subjectivity as militants. I call the process that results from the personal decision to engage militantly in a political project metamorphosis, in order to convey the radical rupture implied in one's life, the breaking of one's life in two. The role of the militants who moved to Chiapas, and of Marcos himself, in the insurrection of 1994 has usually been treated rather superficially, and stripped of its theoretical and practical implications for the future. Neither the Gramscian concept of the 'organic intellectual', nor the non-academic radical perspectives' critique of the Marcos protagonism, and despite the fact that such a critique is often right, nor any of the other theoretical perspectives I reviewed in Chapter 2, tell us anything about the process of metamorphosis that marked the lives of individual militants, and preceded the Zapatista insurrection. It is not my intention to idealise or fetishise Marcos and the other militants, nor to produce heroes and idols. However, Marcos's personal militant trajectory and involvement with the Zapatista project, as well as the way he has personally approached his trajectory, offers us the opportunity to explore militancy as personal metamorphosis in interaction with a collectivity that opens up the terrain for a revolutionary outbreak.

Marcos started his life as Rafael Guillén, born into a middle-class Mexican family. He lived an active life in the city and had a passion for novels, cinema, theatre and politics. Marxist in his political formation, and an intense reader of Foucault and Althusser whose theories employed in his thesis on the ideological practices in the primary school textbooks in Mexico, he held a position as a lecturer

in 'the theory of graphic arts' at the Autonomous Metropolitan University of Mexico. As described by people who knew him at the time, Rafael Guillén had been interested in political activity beyond the walls of the academy, his interest was to apply philosophy in practice, and his political contacts, as well as his travels to Havana and Nicaragua, demonstrated an active explorative search for resources for radical political action. However, up to that point his personal trajectory and activity were no different from those of many others of the radical left in Mexico and not only so, and none of the people who knew him could imagine his future trajectory:

Neither his activities, nor his thesis, nor his profile were leading him towards an armed movement. I believe that was a very personal decision, without connections with his presence in the university. I don't know if there was a rupture in his personality or he still has the same, I do not know what was his evolution. (Morelos, quoted in De La Grange and Rico, 1997, p. 93)

Rafael Guillén, indeed, took a highly personal decision and one day in the early 1980s made the long trip from Mexico City to Chiapas where he joined the cadres formed by other *mestizo* and indigenous militants in the jungle. What followed was the meeting with the indigenous reality, a meeting that led to the completion of his metamorphosis, and the metamorphosis of the indigenous communities. In the jungle urban discourses and tactics melded with indigenous languages and practices, Marxism became nagualism and nagualism became Marxism, personal lives were radically transformed, and the indigenous communities started transforming into a pre-vental situation subject. From then on, Guillén's life in the city was over, his family never saw him again, relationships were broken and a new configuration of being emerged lived as a revolutionary life. Eventually, one day in the jungle, Guillén passed away and a new person was born committed to a revolutionary project. That new person bore the name Marcos. Many years later, having experienced his life as a splitting in two, as a metamorphosis, Marcos would explain to all those who wondered who he was and where he came from, that his name was

Marcos Montes de la Selva ('Marcos of the mountains of the jungle'), son of Old Antonio and Lady Juanita ... that he was born in the guerrilla camp called *Agua Fria* in the Lacandona jungle, Chiapas, in the early morning one day in August 1984 ... The man with the voice says that he was reborn the first of

January 1994 ... He of the voice confesses that, before being born, being able to possess everything in order to have nothing, he decided to possess nothing in order to have everything. (EZLN, 1995, n.p.).

The last sentence of the quote is the imperative that led Marcos to the decision to become a guerrilla; the abandonment of a sutured life for a revolutionary life, a life with no possessions, virtue vs fortune, as Negri reading Machiavelli tells us (see Chapter 3). Note here that Marcos argues that he was born twice: first, after his decision to produce a rupture in his life and move to the jungle; second, in the insurrection of 1994. In other words, the first Marcos was the pre-evental subject exploring the conditions of a given situation that would, eventually, bring about the Zapatista rebellion. The second Marcos was nothing other than the subject that emerged as a result of the rebellion as an expression of the collective indigenous subject of fidelity. Like the case of Marcos and the other EZLN militants, like all the Zapatistas, today the impasses of global capitalism make individual and collective metamorphosis the only way for a radical transformation of life. Unlike Marcos, however, who also confessed that 'among the human race, he has a special affection for the Mexican race' (EZLN, 1995, n.p.), we have affection for no particular nation or race. Our struggle is for a nationless and raceless socialism, and we are armed with a desire for revolution.

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